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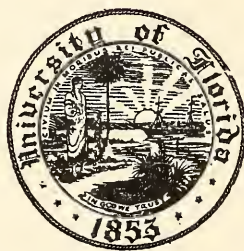
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# Apples by Ocean

# BOOKS BY Robert P. Tristram Coffin

## Poems

CHRISTCHURCH  
DEW AND BRONZE  
GOLDEN FALCON  
THE YOKE OF THUNDER  
BALLADS OF SQUARE-TOED AMERICANS  
STRANGE HOLINESS  
SALTWATER FARM  
MAINE BALLADS  
COLLECTED POEMS

THERE WILL BE BREAD AND LOVE  
PRIMER FOR AMERICA  
POEMS FOR A SON WITH WINGS  
PEOPLE BEHAVE LIKE BALLADS  
COLLECTED POEMS,  
NEW AND ENLARGED EDITION  
ONE-HORSE FARM  
APPLES BY OCEAN

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MAINE DOINGS

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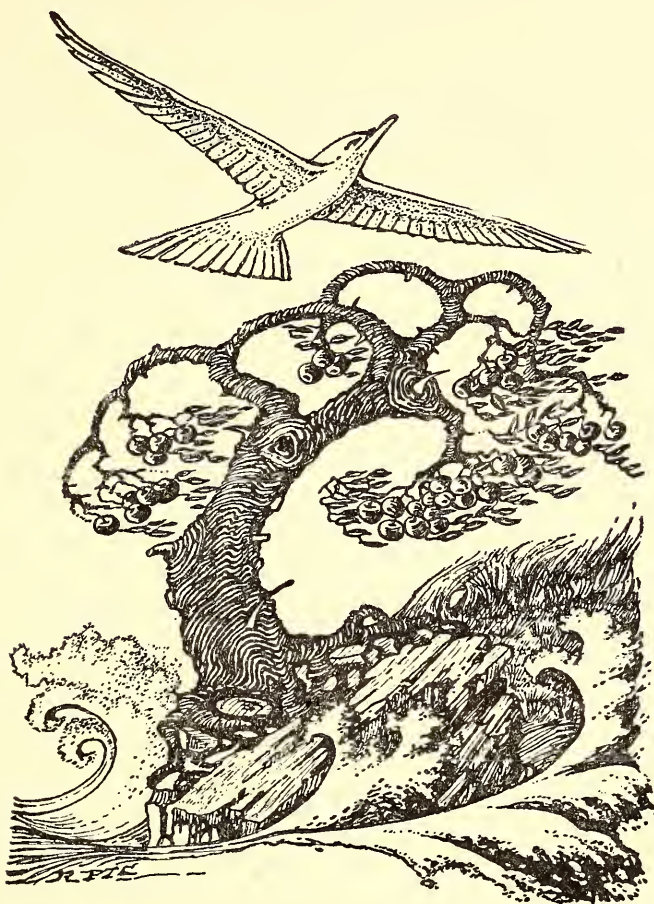
A BOOK OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY  
PROSE  
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PROSE AND  
POETRY (*Both with A. M. Wither-  
spoon*)



# Apples by Ocean

BY

Robert P. Tristram Coffin



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1950

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First Printing

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

C-3  
To

THE GRAHAMS

DAVID AND ELINOR

FELLOW WRITERS

GOOD NEIGHBORS

AND

GOOD FRIENDS

WHO KNEW MANY

OF THESE POEMS

IN THE ACT

1-23-51 B & d Univ. Col. c-3

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# Apples by Ocean



## Apples by Ocean

Common sons and common fathers gathered  
And brought tame apples home in blue-wheeled carts,  
But this son and his father went by ocean  
And rowed wild apples home through sapphires' hearts.

They carried sacks bulging with wild hard honey  
From trees sown by thin Indians and deer,  
Carried wild apples on their backs to the bay side  
Through the cool bonfire of the dying year.

The smell of frost, the smell of briefed sunlight,  
Of bayberry and apples mingled in,  
The golden powder of the late light dusted  
The man and boy on forehead, cheeks, and chin.

They walked through fiery dust up to their nostrils  
And came bent low with apples to the shore,  
Put down the bags in a boat spiced by salt water,  
And pushed off into the ocean's azure core.

They sang past islands carved like polished onyx,  
Their oars kept time in rhythm clear and sweet,  
The scent of apples crushed in the sea water  
Was sharp as sudden joy around their feet.

The evening over them was all clear amber,  
They rowed unweary inside an amber stone  
Electric with the light, the father being  
A boy again, the boy a man full-blown.

They rowed home fast, but they knew they would never  
Be home from sea or out of this golden night,  
They would be with apples there forever  
Walled in the immortality of light.

## Pity Us All

Pity now the slender traveller,  
The humming-bird on trackless air,  
Going south, an inch of Summer  
Over the miles of earth blown bare.

Pity, too, the silken swallows  
Threading high the thunderful gales  
With nothing to guide them but quicksilver  
Intelligence in wings and tails.

Pity the amber civilizations  
In the benumbed and silent hive  
With only the glassy pinions working  
To keep the jewelled hearts alive.

Think with compassion on the furry  
Where they dig their homesteads deep  
And feed on the Summer of their bodies  
Through the long Winter of their sleep.

Pity us all who shrink and perish  
Thought by thought, red Fall by Fall,  
Whose youth goes on the high Autumnal  
Journey and comes not back at all.



## Forgive My Guilt

Not always sure what things called sins may be,  
I am sure of one sin I have done.  
It was years ago, and I was a boy,  
I lay in the frostflowers with a gun,  
The air ran blue as the flowers, I held my breath,  
Two birds on golden legs slim as dream things  
Ran like quicksilver on the golden sand,  
My gun went off, they ran with broken wings  
Into the sea, I ran to fetch them in,  
But they swam with their heads high out to sea,  
They cried like two sorrowful high flutes,  
With jagged ivory bones where wings should be.

For days I heard them when I walked that headland  
Crying out to their kind in the blue,  
The other plovers were going over south  
On silver wings leaving these broken two.  
The cries went out one day ; but I still hear them  
Over all the sounds of sorrow in war or peace  
I ever have heard, time cannot drown them,  
Those slender flutes of sorrow never cease.  
Two airy things forever denied the air !  
I never knew how their lives at last were spilt,  
But I have hoped for years all that is wild,  
Airy, and beautiful will forgive my guilt.

## Shore Graveyards

Summer people wonder why the best  
Hilltops looking out here on the sea  
Are taken up by people gone to rest;  
The graveyards spoil the sightliest property,  
And that, they hold, is poor economy.

Yet there is something, maybe, in this giving  
Those who are gone as good things as you can;  
And hilltops in high wind are not for living,  
Low houses are the best for the fishing man;  
It's Summer folks, not natives, want to tan.

In far old times all sailing men took care  
To paint sharp eyes upon their ship's sharp prow.  
Might happen, in those old graveyards up there  
Good eyes are watching over sailing people now.  
Graves look well on headlands, anyhow.

## Church on Water

Always in music, nights and days and years,  
Will this small church by the river be,  
Where the green water curves over the cliffs  
And goes down white and steep into the sea.

Never, to sing the old Creator's praise,  
Will this house be without young congregations,  
For, all the Aprils, teeming alewives come  
Climbing these singing falls in their white nations.

So lucky the people are who worship here  
Beside the running children old as dawn,  
Waters going to sea and fish to land,  
Children the years can put no weariness on.

Men and women in this happy house  
Can look out from good faces and good words  
And see good winds and waters going by,  
Blue herons and white seagulls, the clean birds.

It should be easy to believe between  
Organs of falling waters and the sea,  
Here feet and fins and wings are cousinly,  
Time is the small brother to eternity.

## The Grieving Wind

For the wind that blows around their houses' eaves  
These people have a word, they say, it "grieves."  
And that is the right word for the wind out there  
When days are drawing in and fields grow bare.

Yet even in the Summers on this coast  
Always in broad daylight there is a ghost  
At every house's corner to warn men  
That death and Winter always come again.

It is a good thing for householders to know  
They who sleep under wool will sleep under snow,  
Come so many more of the brief nights,  
And wind at last will blow out the last lights.

It may well be that wind—what man can tell?—  
Is the thing that keeps coast people well.  
What are ghosts for if not to do the duty  
Of warning men to make the most of beauty?

Hark, the little slender grief is there!  
Aeolian lyre woven of hollow air.  
So say your best words, comfort your love, your friend!  
There is the snow, the silence at the end.



## Doubled Good

Here at the azure corner of the world  
Sweet fields come down to meadows of the sea,  
Red clovers dip their flowers in high water,  
White houses and white sails keep company.  
No cowbell rings so lonely but there is  
A bell that answers it upon the waves,  
A hollow bell rung lonesome by the tide  
Tolls above the schooners' shadowy graves.  
The hayrack and the boat go side by side,  
Level, on green and gold, small brothers ride.

Every good or sorrowful thing comes double:  
Blue herons and morning-glories bring up dawn,  
Blue shells of wild-pea fringe the mussel-bed,  
Bleached clamshells shine by daisies on the lawn.  
When the strong man bows his iron head  
On his empty arms at night and grieves,  
A strong wind from the ocean will arise  
And come and mourn with him around the eaves.  
When wives sit still with sorrow in their eyes,  
High over all the world the seagull cries.

## Holy Well

One green spot in the pasture he knew well  
Was holy. Something, any boy could tell,  
There was about this place. Here was a square  
Wall of turf. A house had once stood there;  
A hundred years of grass and the white clover  
Had never been able to cover the cellar over.  
It slanted down in one place steep and deep;  
Never the merriest lamb among the sheep  
Dared to venture into this breathless dell,  
And what long years ago had been a well  
Had gone back into wildness and a pool  
With ferns curved over water, blue and cool  
As the sky it came from, after the thunder.  
But what was the node and heart of this deep wonder,  
Was a briar-rose barbed fierce with thorns,  
And it held up some long-dead deer's sharp horns.

Wild branches built by blood! And blood of the deer  
Still ran in them among branches with clear  
Rose-blood in them. Blossoms on this briar  
Were pinker than the sky when set on fire  
By Summer dawns. No other roses grew  
So sweet or large as these. Yet the boy knew  
He must never, never pick or touch them,  
However much his fingers ached to clutch them,  
Nor ever put his hot feet in that blue  
Water there or ever brush those ferns which grew  
Deeply over it. It was not right to do it;  
He did not know the reason, yet he knew it.  
Somewhere in old books he had read of a thing  
That came over men at some pool like the wing  
Of a great bird flying. By the water's side  
They knelt bowed down in thirst until they died.

## The Weather-Breeder

The day is like the glass plate paved with diamonds  
Our grandmothers ate off, the Sandwich one,  
Not even a lamb of the clouds that mean fair weather,  
From east to west a glass sky, a glass sun.

The darkest evergreens drip molten silver,  
A mile of diamonds spills across the bay,  
A house with pepper dots in rows for windows  
Is only the next narrow field away.

A church too far for a churchgoer of fifty  
Is close enough for a short-legged one of three,  
All the houses in a steep high harbor  
Are ivory dice spilled down into the sea.

The world is under waterless deep water  
That shines above a sunlit boiling-spring,  
And if you flicked the blue sky with your finger,  
The blue sky from the east to west would ring.

But the old fisherman shrugs his high shoulders,  
“This is a weather-breeder now for fair!”  
He is sure the morning is so pleasant  
It means there’s something dangerous in the air.

He seems to be so dyed-in-the-wool New England  
He is bound to set sweet off by sour,  
It’s like the tough New England briar-roses—  
Fifty wicked fishhooks to one flower.

Next morning comes in thick with squalls, wild horses  
Are coming white from sea with manes uncurled,  
And on the misty headlands the low briars  
Are starred with the loveliest blossoms of the world.

## The Corner of the Year

Here, at a pin's point, Summer ends;  
The independent birds turn friends  
All at once, they hush and eye  
The long road of the open sky.

The high and hazy gentle trees  
Discover a cruel growing breeze  
In their branches, the trees quiver,  
The skimming swallows have left the river.

Nothing is changed, yet everything  
Is poised and taut, the crickets sing  
Still in the grasses, on and on,  
But Summer the beautiful is gone.

Blue to the north is a sky so clear  
It means the corner of the year  
Has been turned, from now on all  
Leaves and men face to the Fall.

Frost is but slender weeks away,  
Tonight the sunset glow will stay,  
Swing to the north and burn up higher  
And Northern Lights wall earth with fire.

Nothing is lost yet, nothing broken,  
And yet the cold blue word is spoken:  
Say goodbye now to the sun,  
The days of love and leaves are done.

## Line Gale

Trees remember if a man forgets  
When the blond father of the corn goes south  
Over the Line, the gales come out of hiding  
With the year's leaves and whitecaps in their mouth.

The little mice remember and are shaken  
In their sage galleries of etched earth and straw,  
Birds solitary throng into high nations,  
Turn their beaks south before inexorable law.

The farmer in his bed, deep in his dreaming,  
Feels the sun slip to the under hemisphere,  
Cries his deep cry, though he knows not he cries it,  
Hail and farewell to the green half of the year.

Hail and farewell! Next morning, death is the caller,  
On the north sides of all things lies the frost,  
And fumbling fingers at the stove and hearthstones  
Kindle thin suns in place of the lovely lost.

## Lost Creature

It had been seen in dark firs by the bay,  
Children coming home from school had seen it go  
Across September dusk two fields away,  
Always alone, and it was white as snow,  
White as the snow, and always by itself  
Its own kind shied from it as a thing apart;  
It was unlucky to see it, people said,  
It was so white, it gave a man a start,  
Even the hounds, scenting so strange a thing,  
Dropped their tails and came home whimpering.

It had been often on the woman's mind,  
Yet when she went this morning through the frost  
To feed the hens, her heart came in her throat,  
To come on a thing so lovely and so lost.  
There in the petalled rose the rising sun  
Made of the frosted field, slender as fear,  
Quiet as sorrow stood the snowy deer.  
It might mean death, or happiness, but no  
Such beautiful a creature should be so.



## The Ones in the Barn Believe

The satin mice creaking last Summer's grass  
Come on dry wine of miraculous clover;  
They know; their eyes sprinkle the barn with stars;  
They have no history to seal their sharp eyes over.  
The pullets on the rafters in the henhouse,  
Cockerels, whose eyes see through earth's crust  
And track the midnight sun, believe tomorrow  
Will strew incredible kernels in their dust.  
Only the farmer fumbling, cold and slow,  
With his pail and pitchfork does not know.

Every last wide-eared sheep in the pen turns amber  
At her trusting eyes in the lantern light,  
Remembers, without memory, such another  
Frosty time and wild wings snowing the night.  
The cows know, without knowledge, it once happened,  
And happen again in this new barn it may;  
Their eyes grow large and tremulous foreseeing  
The sun like a gentle daisy in their hay.  
Even the milker stroking warm teats half believes  
Such things as gods could be on Christmas Eves.

## Formula for Peace

The happiest beings on this earth,  
Though not in heaven, live close by it;  
This is their formula for peace:  
Mice and milk and warmth and quiet.

Cats that live in great farm barns  
Enjoy a universe apart;  
Security is its high hay walls,  
Silence is its dusky heart.

It never rains, it never snows,  
Summer is forever there,  
Clover, grass immortalized  
Sweeten forever the still air.

The cats unruffled in their fur  
Hear winds outside shaking the world;  
They do not have to hunt, their prey  
Comes to them where they lie upcurled.

Mice fattened on a bygone June,  
Mice fragrant of a spicy May  
Come through the January frost  
To serve these cats lapped warm in hay.

When zero weather bites the earth,  
Cats go to the tie-up, and they lie  
Along the backs of sleepy cows,  
They drowse in peace upon July.

Morning and evening there is milk  
Warm from udders for their diet;  
The world runs like an endless song—  
Mice and milk, sweet heat, sweet quiet.

## Go Down Standing

Here in his pasture tamed two hundred Summers  
An eight-pronged buck's high horns were on the sky,  
The deer stood calm among the grazing heifers,  
His only wildness was his rounded eye.  
A forest thing wild as a hazel tree  
Stood tame. It was a sorry thing to see.

Deer went this way, they said, when they were ailing,  
Made up to men, went tame, came up to farms,  
Forgot their old wild ways and trusted farmers  
They hated once to keep them from old harms,  
Grazed quiet with the cows at the woods' hem  
And tried their best to be like one of them.

All day the man remembered and was bothered,  
He hoped the antlered truant there would go  
Back to his woods. But when the cows swayed homeward,  
There were the high horns coming in the row,  
Meek as the rest and with the slave's slow tread  
Came one that wore the wildwood on his head.

The man remembered seeing a broken eagle  
That needed the whole wide sky for his great wings  
Eating the scraps that had been saved for chickens.  
Fear and quick death were best for the wild things.  
He should go down standing, this proud one.  
The man went into the house and got the gun.

## Yellow-Leg Plovers

Summer has reached high-water mark,  
Down from the sun falls spark on spark,  
Out of the sky too high to see  
Wild flutes drop music down to me.

Four notes so lovely brief they stay  
After their sweetness dies away,  
High in the azure lingering,  
The yellow-legs are on the wing.

And down the plovers drop to sight  
In W's of effortless flight,  
They skim along the fringe of sand,  
And like a scale of notes they land.

In unison in the fierce sun  
On golden wires for legs they run,  
All dipping beaks and liting tails  
Like a fleet of sequent sails.

To a razor's temper thinned,  
Living sculptures of the wind,  
They bow and bob so fluent fleet  
They do without the use of feet.

They swing in with this wave and sweep  
Out with that towards the deep,  
On rainbows in the sand they trace  
Changing scallops of live lace.

And all together, at no sign,  
They wheel into air in flawless line,  
Rise, return into the sun,  
Turn flutes, and die out one by one.

## The Sun and Moon Stand Still

Evening of all evenings of the year,  
The widened sun stands still upon the trees,  
The western half of the world runs drops of fire  
Like swarms of golden incandescent bees.  
The eastern half of earth runs silver moths,  
For over the trees of dawn and their soft lace  
The vast white moon stares clear and quietly ;  
The sun and moon have come out face to face ;  
Earth floods with far antiphonals of light,  
For once there is no day, there is no night.

For five slender moments, for as long  
As swallows take to fly from east to west,  
All people go with seraphs' eyes and brows  
Between the time of work and time of rest ;  
No man has a shadow, none a shade  
Of sorrow on his face or line of woe,  
The door into his heart is opened wide,  
And each man floods his neighbor with his glow ;  
For the time the sun and moon stand still,  
Men are men of light and breathe good will.

## This Is the Poem

This is the poem, this is Maine ;  
Sunlight on all things like frost,  
Eternity at the end of the lane,  
A garden the deer have always crossed.

Woods that come down to the waves,  
Pine boughs brushing the apple tree,  
Cool white houses, high white graves,  
And a man rowing up the sea.

Sweetfern growing in the corn,  
The mountain on the whitecapped tide,  
A buck that feeds with slender horn  
By the lamb's white gentle side.

The silver fish under the floor,  
Lamps and lighthouses at night,  
The secret and the sudden door  
That opens dark in a hill of light.

Hot spruces and cool mussel shells,  
Tame and friendly bells in under  
Necks of cows and the wild bells  
Rung by waves white with sea thunder.

A coast like columns fluted clean  
Where common men go like winged things,  
Single forever, on paths that lean  
Under a sky alive with wings.



## Small Bee in Clover

The small boy with the cornsilk hair  
Was all over the train,  
Like quicksilver he was not there,  
And then popped up again.

He was alive out to the tips  
Of his ears and feet,  
His shoes were boy, his trousers boy,  
He danced like lambent heat.

He gripped two seat-arms, and he ran  
On nothing but thin air,  
Stood on his head and ran as well  
Shady-side-up there.

I looked about to see why this  
Small boy had run wild,  
And, sure as sunlight, there she was,  
A honey-haired girl-child.

No wonder the boy was showing off  
All his curves and mind,  
The wisdom in his head, his feet,  
His before, behind.

Any man would do the same  
Though not so well all over,  
Never expect a bee to be  
Calm in blossomed clover.

## Blue Evening

It was so still a twig that snapped  
Seemed loud as if someone had tapped  
The thin glass bowl turned over tight  
On the world, on the blue night.  
The deep snow gave off all the light  
There was on earth. The dark trees waded  
In azure light until they faded  
Uphill into the mountain's gloom.  
A bare birch had a powdery bloom  
Upon it which came off on the air.  
Not a bird or breath stirred there,  
Life was a thing on another planet,  
The night was lapis lazuli, granite,  
The sky was solid sapphire stone,  
The birch tree was a dry white bone  
Of Summer a score of years ago;  
The world was marble, not soft snow.  
Each nervous squirrel was petrified,  
Each rabbit ice, and the wide-eyed  
Owl had become wood of the tree  
It sat on tight and warily.  
  
Never had earth held her breath so  
As on this night of azure snow.

## Exile

And now he had his farm safe in his pocket.  
No door to fix the hinges on or lock it  
Against the snow and rats. All wheels and cogs  
On much machinery sound as seasoned logs  
Against the years. All cows and heifers in,  
Milking done for good. Each crib, each bin  
Closed on decay. His trees saved from slow rot.  
He had sold everything. His fields were not  
Any thicker than the paper folded  
In his pocket now. All would have molded  
In time, the high beams in his barn, the leather  
On his harnesses. The coldest weather,  
The warmest, wind, hail could not harm him more.  
He went out of his house, he closed the door.

He went out, and bitterness came in  
Through all the bones he had, his hard long chin  
Went down upon his shirt. A stranger now  
To the sweet hay, the warm milk, the cold plow,  
To teaching a son to handle young colts right,  
Roses of frost that bloomed an Autumn night,  
The wise tracks of small beasts upon the snow,  
Sharp winds of March that made a good man go  
In to his fire like a bridegroom ready,  
Furrows arching his feet, salt sweat, the heady  
Smell of horses working into his mind.  
He went out an exile, safe and blind,  
To emptiness and ease, old age, a cottage,  
An Esau with lips bitter from his pottage.

## Cowbell

It was the sound he loved so well—  
A square bronze baritone of a bell,  
Low as a male voice speaking deep  
On the edge of love or edge of sleep.

It made him think of men on mows,  
It was music New England cows  
Carry under their chins as calm  
On steep hills as the Twenty-Third Psalm.

It came from metal wrought by hands  
Shaped beautiful by rocky lands,  
The music in it came down through  
Cow after cow, dew after dew.

A freckled boy with patched behind  
Had followed it time out of mind  
Through silvery peepers, crystal crickets,  
To find the cows in twilight thickets.

The ancestors of most men hung  
In that bell and used its tongue,  
Spoke to their children wandered far  
From farmhouses under the evening star.

Every tonkle, every stroke  
Of iron on the bronze rim spoke  
Of evening, coming home, of waiting  
Wives, the sweet white sheets, the mating.

No wonder this bell pleased him so,  
Deep in him he heard it go,  
In and away, come and depart,  
Through the red chambers of his heart.

## Little Boys Cannot Sit Still

Try hard and handsome as he will,  
A little boy cannot sit still,  
The harder that he tries and tries,  
The more upheavals in him rise;  
He may have roses for a face,  
But there are thorns along his base.  
He has a body full of twitches  
And earthquake temblors in his breeches.  
He sits with May-Month in his eyes,  
But January's in his thighs.

Small girls sit in school as calm  
As Ruth or as the Twenty-Third Psalm;  
But Job is in the small boys' hips,  
Their pants heave with the Apocalypse.

I think it is because boys can  
Never control the yeast of man  
Working in them, they must rise  
Like biscuits or like blueberry pies;  
They cannot ever keep from showing  
How fast and fiercely they are growing.

A schoolroom full of small boys squirms  
Like a can of angleworms  
Left out in the sun two hours;  
But it takes worms to make best flowers.

## The Gentle Ones

They walk always with a breaking at the knee,  
Their hands are scarred and broken by the sea,  
Their faces are as hard as granite stones,  
But they have gentleness built in their bones.  
Between the teeth of ledges they have been broken,  
Yet of all men they are the gentlest-spoken,  
They do not lift their voices when they speak  
Though gales have made a hollow of each cheek.

They are the men who set the lobster traps  
In sudden death's and Winter's very laps,  
Who fight their way to home through scud in small  
Boats where schooners came not home at all.  
Under their keels their fathers' bones are whitening  
They handle ice and loneliness and lightning  
And come home from where roaring blizzards blow  
And speak as soft as first fall of the snow.

These are men who make but little noise,  
Their women think of them as little boys  
When they gentle them to food and bed,  
They go quiet with age white on their head.  
They are men good to hold the baby  
And teach it gentleness and quiet maybe,  
Good men to have in the kitchen rocking-chair,  
Never in the way, just handsomely there.

These who have broken ice-floes with their prows  
Are the tender milkers of the cows,  
They stand up to the north wind like a ram  
But bow their heads and soothe the new-born lamb.  
I think it is the weather teaches them  
To blossom like the wild-rose on a stem  
Barbed with thorns. They learn from Maine's brief suns  
The strong ones are always the gentle ones.



## Winter Sparks

Cold Winter evening rounds the white world over  
With arch of stars so far they are like frost,  
The few small farmhouses have shrunk and drifted  
Far apart, and their small lights are lost  
In this night made luminous with snow,  
The ways between the farms are long to go,  
Only the little foxes here have crossed.

Yet in these shrunken farms and these far houses  
Go little lamps and lanterns one by one,  
And the eyes of eager cows and horses  
Are kindled by thin cousins of the sun.  
Heat and life are here still in the only  
Warm lights between the cold earth and the lonely  
Stars so far away their heat is done.

Life is here though dwindled to a dozen  
Steps between the grain bin and the hay,  
Love is here in numbed but tender gestures  
Though love has but little now to say.  
In the scattered sparks of these small fires  
Are sleeping the high bonfires, the desires  
Which will blow up and be a Summer's day.

## Country Boy Sliding

On all the white miles of fine snow  
Between high sprucewoods and the bay  
There was only one living thing,  
A farm boy at his Winter play.

He pulled his new sled up the hill,  
Lifted it without a smile,  
Ran, and threw himself on it  
And soberly hurtled half a mile.

He rose and dusted diamonds off  
His scarf and breeches, took the rope  
And drew his sled with lonely eyes  
Up the long hill's lonely slope.

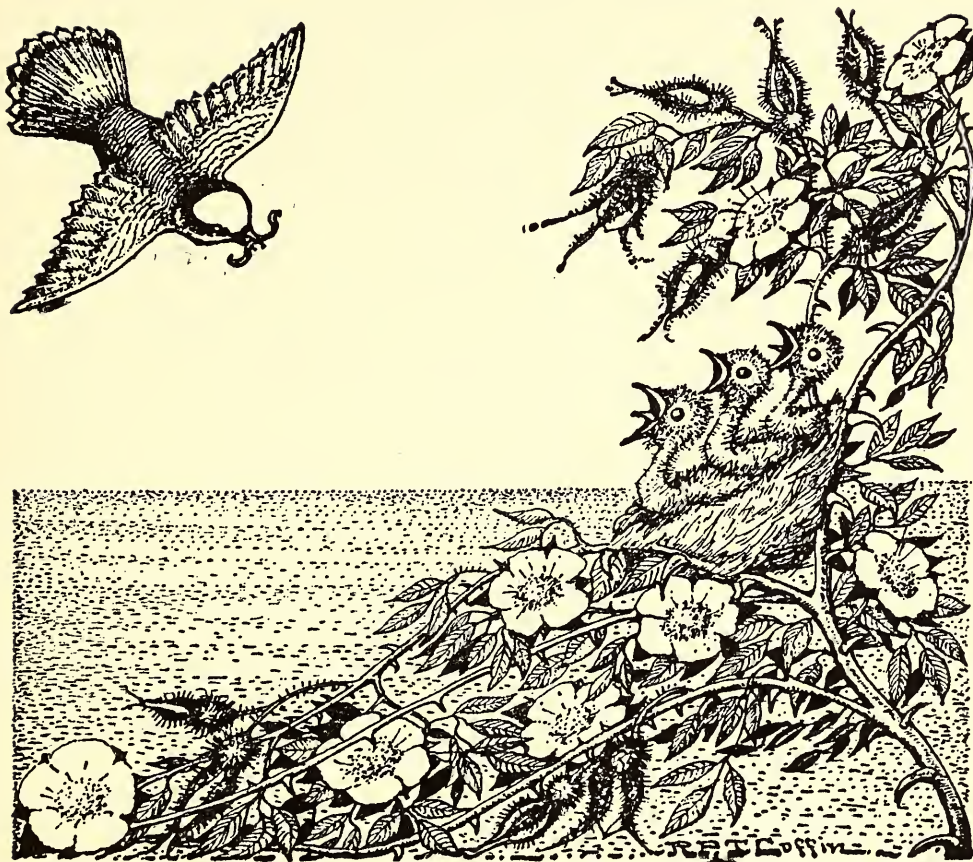
The slider took his pleasure deep  
As quiet country people do,  
Without lost motion or a sound  
Through sober loveliness he flew.

In crystal beauty like a trance  
This was all there was of joy  
To point the world-wide stillness up,  
A rapt unsmiling little boy.

The rabbits sat along the swamp,  
Each on his cushion there behind,  
They watched with grave approval this  
Pleasure so of their own kind.

The little boy made an intense  
Business of his Winter fun  
Until the spruces swallowed up  
The golden cartwheel of the sun.

Then on short legs he took home,  
Without a whistle, by deep starlight,  
A joy as deep in him for good  
As a strong man's wedding night.



## The Call

Wood-thrushes were singing behind the wall,  
It was high time he made his annual call.  
Tom brushed and put his coat on, rubbed the fat  
On his shoes. This once he wore a hat  
During the year. It was years out of date.  
He climbed the hillside spry for seventy-eight,  
Yet he was thankful all the friends he had  
Were in one place and all heard what he said.

The first Tom had a word with was Len Gray:  
“It’s most too good a day for even May—  
A weather-breeder.” Len was always one  
To take a lot of pleasure in the sun.  
Tom told John Holt his grandson’d got a thumping,  
Dan Weatherill was next: “Your pines are jumping,  
You’ll have good lumber there in twenty years!”  
He told Ben Tarr about his Guernsey steers.

“Your housekeeper, Ed Weston, is in clover,  
Shouldn’t be surprised Gil Pratt made over  
His farm to her, he likes her cooking so.”  
Tom took pains to let old Leathers know  
The lobstermen all missed him at the cove.  
Jim lost two dories when the Line Gale stove  
His wharf in. Sally Snow had a new baby,  
“They say now she will have Sam Alcock maybe.”

Bart will be sorry to hear his ell roof leaks  
And Dave be glad to know that no one speaks  
Of his drinking and wife-meddling now,  
And Hugh’s son is a great one with a plow.  
“Well, that’s about the news, I guess. That’s all.”  
Old Tom put on his hat to end his call,  
He pulled a juniper from Leathers’ face,  
He went home smiling from the burying-place.

## Poor-Man's Frosting

Those who know this country know  
Flowers from the drifted snow.

Where saw-tooth spruces cut steel sky  
It's bluets, not snowdrifts, that lie.

Though ice still locks the woodland dells,  
It's peepers tingling, not sleigh bells.

Between the juniper and pine  
On hungriest soil the bluets shine.

Thick as frosting on a cake  
The northern housewife sets to bake.

But frosting made of water, poor  
Soil, and Spring light, nothing more.

Poor-man's frosting, cut into  
Four-petalled snowflakes touched with blue.

Loveliness all of a piece  
With wind-pudding and dream-geese.

But the little blossoms light  
The edges of our northern night,

Beautiful as the live snow  
Where Northern Lights above them blow.

## Cool Bell

Suddenly, two thousand miles  
From home and boyhood was this sound  
Of a bell he would have known  
Over half the world around.

A cool, cool bell from balsam hills  
Here in the palm-trees' flat hot home;  
The last he followed it, he drove  
Cows home by the Maine coast foam.

But now the bell came into sight,  
And it was under a horse's chin,  
Behind it coolness came on wheels  
After the bronze bell's frosty din.

An old man vending ice-cream came,  
A dozen bare blond boys in tow,  
And this Texan handsomeness  
Joined that of the long ago.

Cool milk, sweet milk still could draw  
The little hot boys home from play;  
The man was safe in boyhood still  
Though miles and many years away.



## Fright

As they swung round the turn they came upon him,  
A this-year's huckleberry-colored bear  
So deep in berries he forgot his mother's  
Crinkling up her nose to read the air.

The hairy infant gaped, the huckleberries  
Rolled from his mouth and then a treble squeal,  
He dropped on all fours, closed his eyes and started  
Down the road ahead of the automobile.

Front end, rear end up, he ran so wildly  
It was no run but the bouncing of a ball,  
He had nothing to him but a middle  
And no feet on his fatness showed at all.

Like a little boy he ran all over,  
Missing each chance he had to spring aside,  
Going too fast to let his wits keep even  
And nothing like so long as he was wide.

They had to stop the car and let the baby  
Run his terror out. At the road's bend  
He stopped all tuckered out, and a full minute  
He stared at them sprawled out on his hind end.

## Our Guests

We are not the only ones in our house,  
We must remember the others and be kind  
To the small ones that shelter under our roof  
And eat the crumbs we drop, the seeds, the rind.  
No deed, no wood or plaster can shut out  
Creatures that go on toes silky and wild,  
There is no law in bronze that can maintain  
The sole heir to our house shall be a child.

Our house is large, there are the dwelling places  
Too high, too deep and dark for us to keep,  
Small love and quiet feasting will go on  
After the masters are possessed by sleep ;  
When we who live by lights and fires go  
To our cool dreams which have not any words,  
Then our cooled chimney, roofed with gentle stars,  
Fills with the wings and winsomeness of birds.

When our doors are closed, below our stoop,  
Under the granite stone, a door of earth  
Opens, and below our cellar floor  
The woodchuck's halls and rooms quiver with mirth ;  
Hairy faces touch in shrewd embrace,  
There is the tender language of soft paws ;  
The slim skunk prowls our shed. These are good guests,  
They have their hour ; they keep the starry laws.

## The Knothole

Sometimes the most beautiful comes small ;  
An inch-wide knothole in an old barn's wall,  
Which was an unintentional oversight,  
Lets not only weather in but light.

A man would never guess so much of day  
Could get into the dark so narrow a way ;  
The sun slides through here by the skin of his teeth  
And turns dark straw to topazes beneath.

Even plain dust for once takes to bright wings,  
Ten thousand tiny planets swim in rings  
Along the long and leaning golden bar,  
And every speck of dirt becomes a star.

It is as good as lying looking up  
When an August night upsets the cup  
Of light down over the tallest of the trees  
And nebulae are swarming thick as bees.

A very small but lively boy can slide,  
For all his arching ears and arched backside,  
Through a narrow opening in a bin  
Of apples where scarce squirrel could get in.

It all just goes to show it is a thin  
Door that will not let hot life come in,  
The sun and boys will always bring in light  
Even through holes left by an oversight.

## Each Man Has His Snowstorm

Wherever the bronze lobstermen go  
They are trailed by squalls of snow,  
No matter how sun-drenched be the day,  
It snows seagulls on the bay.

Where the high-nosed dories roll  
Bronze men wear an aureole,  
Sunlight on white hunger burns  
At all the dories' swinging sterns.

The men have faces washed with light  
From the sun and from the white  
Wings by which they are pursued,  
From clean birds clamoring for food.

Always, always hunger nigh them,  
Always seagulls snowing by them,  
Through the years the lean men go  
Each in his own storm of snow.

## Boys on the Dark

Two overalled small boys, blonded by fire,  
Play with their backs against the infinite night,  
They are all laughter and wide-open mouths,  
Their agile curves run hot with firelight.  
On the dark backdrop which makes stars look small  
And sad, the boys rankle with life and zest,  
Neither feels the cold unwillingness  
Of space upon his back forlornly pressed.

Neither boy knows what a brave good game  
He plays with his small legs at widest span  
Burning the maple leaves, he does not know  
He is the whole hot history of man.  
Light on the dark of bitter nothingness,  
Bodies made of earth daring to be  
Washed in the blood of suns and friends with fire,  
Two brief boys play at immortality.

## Young Lightning on the Line

Swallows, for all their ancient wings,  
Are not opposed to modern things,  
They make the most of progress where  
Wires talk along the air.

Barn rafters are not half so fine  
Places to hang the long, long line  
Of this year's nestlings out to dry  
As wires that reach across the sky.

From the blue east to blue west  
Infant lightnings, soft of breast,  
Sit tail to tail with little dark  
Beads of eyeballs spark to spark.

All the country people's words  
Go through hopeful baby birds,  
Go through a feathered hunger-zone  
Strung out on the telephone.

Mother comes on a sudden arc,  
At full speed she hits the mark,  
Gives the proper bill her kiss  
Along the line, she cannot miss.

Equal justice swells each young  
Bead upon the thin thread strung,  
Thanks to man who talks by steel  
Young lightning gets an easy meal.



## Seed

Mold on the empty harness, dust in the bin.  
He had been ill, his wide farm had shrunk in,  
Truant firs were coming out of the woods  
Into his hayfields. He had sold his goods;  
There had been the dark wind-bitten day  
He had seen his livestock led away  
And felt for the first time his barn grow cold;  
The empty cow-stalls turned him suddenly old.

The barn's big beams were high as the sky at dawn  
Now all the Winter's hay was sold and gone.  
The floor planks creaked because of nothing to bear,  
Nothing was left to work but his heart there,  
And it was much too small for so large a space.  
Some day the cobwebs would brush on his face.  
Barn full of nothing but quiet and dust!  
Yet there was one thing left in which to trust.

For one small corner, like a pillar of light,  
Had life still in it. He would make his fight  
From there to fill his barn and life once more;  
There was his seed, two heifer calves of four  
Months of Summer. He had held back two  
Lovely things made from the hay he grew,  
Two for company. From this slender start  
His farm would grow again and fill his heart.

## Disillusionment

The humming-bird with blazing eyes  
Swoops upon the butterflies,  
He will not have them stealing sweet  
From his flowers. Like lambent heat  
He plays above each golden cup  
The spicebush boughs are holding up;  
As often backward as ahead,  
A living dagger dripping red,  
Hate in feathery verdigris,  
He dives upon the bumblebees.

It is a startling thing to find  
Anger of our heavy kind  
In lightest feathers, this cold ire  
In an inch of licking fire.  
It surely makes a man suppose  
There might be rancor in a rose.

## Man Sometimes Helps

Man, for all his mischief, sometimes helps  
Furred and feathered kind that live by able  
Husbandry of seasons, winds, and sun,  
When he mows, he sets the birds a table,  
They follow after, feasting on the horde  
Of insects he has robbed of bed and board.

Man builds his barn so high to house his hay  
He brings the sky in, too, the swallows dart  
And feed their young upon the wing with wide  
Scrollwork of exuberant outdoors art.  
The verandas where man sits and talks  
Are houses never shadowed by the hawks.

Birds and beasts are glad when farmers grow  
Like Winter on their hair and stiff of knee,  
The rabbits move in through the broken fence,  
The woodchucks take the cellar in staid glee,  
Foxes take over the plot with slanting stones  
Where the farmer hopes to lay his bones.

If people dread to see the shingles fall  
And rust break old line-fences, birds rejoice,  
For each nail pulled by frost is a new nail  
In a house where small birds try their treble voice.  
Stonewalls are safer hills than ones of earth,  
Beams make the best tree for a robin's birth.

## Lost Room

He could not believe this childhood room,  
It was so low, it was so small;  
Once a silver army on horses went  
Between him and his shadow on the wall,  
And hounds leaner than the northwest wind  
Sniffed the dark behind the bed's high head;  
Slim things like deer ran over the ceiling there  
When father came up late with his lamp to bed.

No man so great as his father was in his thighs,  
So lovingkind in the spread of his naked breast,  
Could have come to sleep with his small son  
In such a room and brought such breathless rest.  
The stars in the little panes were cramped and few;  
And once they were a thousand miles of fire,  
Though the shadow of his father's head  
Was vaster than the starry night entire.

The years had played a trick on him; as he  
Grew taller, wonder, worship, and his pride  
Had dwindled to things too faint to keep  
A small boy's eyes like blue pools deep and wide.  
The man blew out his light and quietly  
Went out of the room and closed the shrunken door,  
He bowed his head and went down the low-pitched stairs  
Of a house too large to live in any more.

## Six Boys in the Sun

It isn't every year, I guess,  
A man sees naked happiness.

But I saw her where she lay  
Bare as young Eve was today.

Six small boys with legs spread wide  
Lay fishing on a brook's green side.

With collars and their minds undone  
The boys were sopping up the sun.

Tight to earth in natural sprawls,  
They were pure peace in overalls.

Back on their older mother's knees,  
With no more morals than the bees.

They held fish-poles, but their thought  
Was bellies and backs arched piping-hot.

A dog of every careless kind  
Kept the universe behind.

Before the boys the world was merely  
Water running sweetly, clearly.

It did not matter if fish bit,  
Life was bread with honey on it.

Earth was a globe of hot green joy  
Curved to the right curves of a boy.

## Five-Foot Summer

A slice of Summer leans in through  
The January high barn door  
Opening to the low wide sun,  
The chaff is topazes on the floor.

Three pitchforks leaning on the mow  
Make long shadows with their prongs,  
Three cats huddle with closed eyes  
And boil and overflow with songs.

This Summer only five-feet wide  
Draws the barn cats from the cows ;  
In their tie-up the cows sense  
This hot light between the mows.

The stanchion chains creak on the poles,  
Cows grow uneasy with their yearning ;  
The cats make all they can of the sun  
And seethe and bubble with their burning.

They know this Summer they sing in  
Will in the hour climb the wall,  
Narrow to a golden knife,  
Glitter, then not be there at all.



## Old Clothes, Best Clothes

A man looks best in his best clothes ;  
But best clothes are not ones he wears on Sunday;  
Those are everyone's; his really best  
Are clothes he gets in for six days on Monday.

It is the cloth he lives in most that counts,  
That adds up to his will and body span,  
The things he works in turn his history,  
The clothes a man wears well become the man.

A coat which proves a man good at a saw  
And by its scars shows him at home in wood,  
Trousers that have grown following a plow  
Have a good right to be known as his good.

It does not stop at bone and muscle, either,  
For the man who works well has a kind  
Of spirit in his shoulders and his thighs,  
Thighs and back and shoulders are his mind.

So the workman multiplies himself  
And is in several places thanks to wear  
He gives his clothes. A wife at home alone  
Looks up and sees her well-built man still there.

## Middle May

On the south side of all apple trees  
During the night past it had snowed,  
The blossoms and the bees in them  
Reached the two hundred miles I rode.

The lights in the dark woods went along,  
Flame of choke pears, the wild cherry,  
On every other pasture slope  
There was a calf with tail kinked merry.

All the meadows towards the sun  
Were buttered with dandelions' light,  
Half of the earth was golden fire,  
And the upper half of it was white.

Between the fire and the snow,  
Boys ran wild on dark blue legs,  
Over the blossomed apple boughs  
The sky was like blue robin-eggs.

The wind was honey and breath of cows,  
The sky was down in the smallest streams,  
Hot horses and the plowmen were  
Something remembered in cool dreams.

Not a sorrow had ever been  
On this seamless unscarred earth,  
I rode two hundred miles and saw  
Nothing on either side but mirth.

## Head Up Like a Deer's

His son was not a bad son. He was weak.  
He always had been. There was that old streak  
Of his mother's taking the easy way,  
Living for the fun and for the day.  
His mother had humored him. He should have known,  
Her short cut to their marriage should have shown.

The mother had egged him on. The girl was pretty,  
She was fun, she laughed. But she was dirty,  
A man could tell, the way she ran after life,  
She would turn out everybody's wife.  
Fun came too easy, she found it everywhere.  
The mother did her work. She did not care.

"If you marry her, I'll shoot you dead."  
That was his word. That was what he'd said.  
The boy was stubborn. He took after his father,  
His mother said. The tall farmer had rather  
See his first-born die than see him wallow  
All the dirty years he knew would follow.

The gray-haired father shifted his twelve-gauge  
On his knees. The boy was at the edge  
Of the bean patch. It was coming gloom.  
He was coming home, the new bridegroom!  
His mother screamed. As always, she was late.  
The gun went off, the son slumped over the gate.

He blew the smoke out of his barrel, rose,  
The dew was falling, he must think of his clothes.  
He had given him life, he had the right  
To take life back. Now there would be no sight  
Of children crawling the floor like things in pens,  
Some his son's, and some the other men's.

His son had been a handsome son when small,  
Too bad a boy must always grow up tall,  
A father ought to hold him as he sleeps  
Forever small. He had his son for keeps.  
His son died quick, his head up like a deer's,  
He would not have to die his own long years.

## Ponds of Air

After the rain had come sharp stars and frost.  
The pasture was full of ice ponds, lovely and lost  
To even the smallest boy a farm could bear,  
For under their fragile ice was only air.

Too beautiful, too thin ever to be  
Scarred by skates, and the small boys could see  
Under crystals of water that did not stay  
Small trees and ferns still growing the green old way.

In every last dry dale were sudden brooks  
Out of the pages of the fairybooks,  
The boys knew well they stood upon the edge  
Of otherwhere. It shone round each dry sedge.

They wished that they could be an acorn's size  
And live in this world that had thin ice for skies.  
They went home quiet, more believers than ever  
In what boys are but tell the grown-ups never.

## The Abyss

It was always there. Behind all work,  
Taking care of her children, love, and trouble;  
The young wife had become resigned, she knew  
The world she worked and loved in now was double.

There was the sea, the wall of winds between  
The life she knew before and this life here,  
Her loneliness was a very steady thing;  
But this otherness was worse than that, or fear.

It was something so immense and whole  
She meant nothing to it night or day,  
Yet it was like a staring antlered deer  
Whose blind hooves kill whoever gets in the way.

Even the cows knew it was there, they kept  
Together in the clearing as they grazed,  
A dozen times a day their heads came up,  
And they all faced the forest gloom amazed.

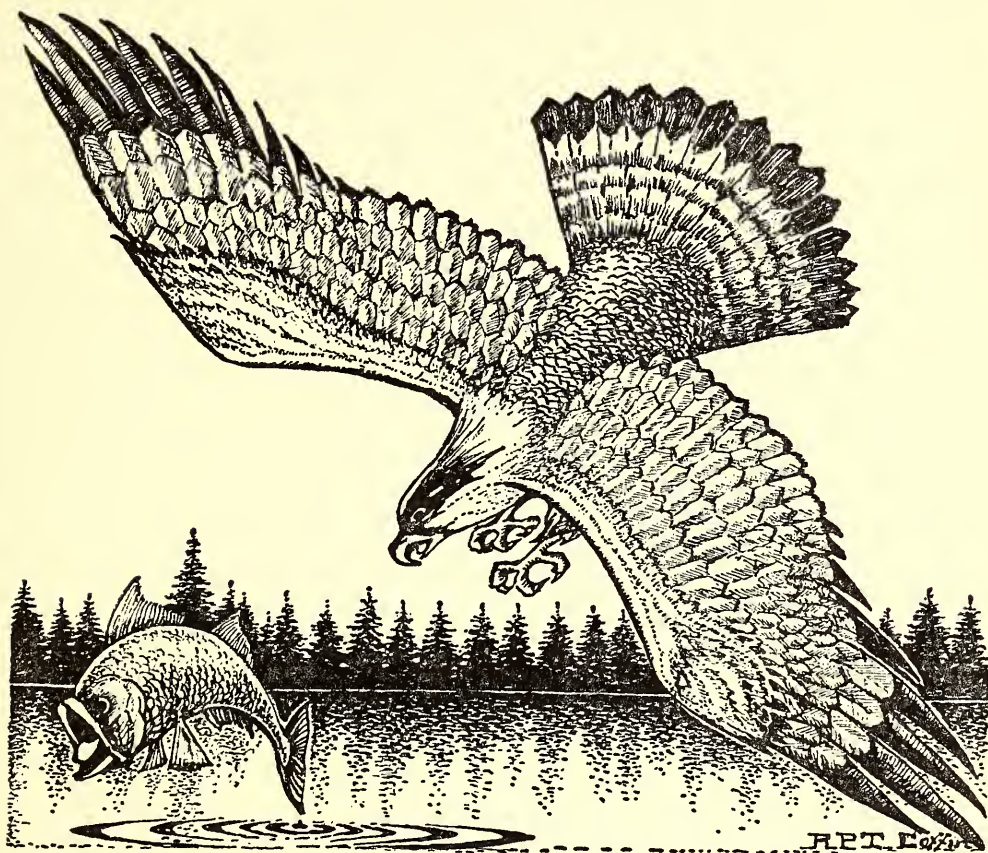
At last the island wife met it alone  
In the middle of a bitter night.  
She had gone to the cove to meet her man,  
And on the headland she had set her light.

As she waited, something stirred the sky,  
And over her lantern was a monstrous thing,  
It caught the small and flickering house of light  
And carried it skyward by its iron ring.

Into the vastness of a starless dark  
She saw her lantern rise and dwindle small,  
Out to sea it swung and fell and rose,  
Till there was no light in the world at all.



Her husband said, when he found her like death,  
Maybe an eagle carried away the light ;  
But she knew it was not an eagle, knew  
She had leaned into the abyss that night.



## To a Boy with Wide Ears

Small boy, sitting there ahead,  
You are lucky! Your ears spread  
So alertly it is clear  
You are cousin to the deer.  
You live out upon the tips  
Of your body, in your hips,  
On the fine points of your hair.  
The chipmunk lives half on the air,  
And though he leaves his tail behind  
When he jumps, his graceful mind  
Stays behind in his slim tail,  
Makes it curve and be a sail;  
You are kin to the chipmunk, too,  
Your ears think your thoughts for you—  
Agile, slender small-boy thoughts,  
Clear as are forget-me-nots.  
Taut and muscled as the mink,  
I can see your sleek head think,  
From the spot where all hairs sprout,  
The spot left when they turned you out,  
Quick and handsome, good thoughts run  
Down your hair like glints of sun.  
  
I hope your ears will never shrink!  
Use your body when you think  
Once you rise to be a man,  
Keep your goodness in the span  
Of your thighs and shoulders. Those  
Lie who say the flesh is gross.  
It can be the word for spirit.  
When you know love, your ears will hear it  
In every curious vein sing sharp  
As the humming-bird's small harp.

May death, when death comes, as it will,  
Find you like a young deer still,  
Head up proudly as death nears,  
Drinking in life at both wide ears !

## Too Late the Squirrel Laughs

Horror bristles the shivering pine,  
The squirrel is frozen to brown ice.  
Dark stillness has come over all  
The snowy-bellied woodland mice.

Not a single crow to cry  
The warning, but the cry is there  
In the tense and terrible  
Quiet on the frosty air.

*Look up! look up!—The tree that moves!  
Drink the wind with nostrils spread!  
The hawk without the wings! The deer  
That goes upright with hornless head!*

Fear has cocked the delicate  
Triggers in the rabbit's thighs,  
The duck puts up her head, the fear  
Rounds the ambers of her eyes.

Too late the duck runs up the air,  
Her gold feet beating empty space,  
Too late the squirrel laughs the laugh  
On his taut unlaughing face.

The red bloom blossoms in the woods,  
There is the high unliving sound,  
It goes from tree to tree, it leaps  
From hill to startled hill around.

Eyes going out as beautiful  
As moonlight burning on hoarfrost,  
And there are red drops on the leaves,  
Wide antlers lying low and lost.

## Afternoon with Goats

My afternoon was full of silvery notes,  
I looked over my hill, and there were goats  
Light as young deer among my late red clover.  
A stripling buck went leaping over and over  
The gentle young she-goats with upright tail,  
Forever the yearn, the mischief, and the male.

The heavy-uddered dam tried hard to be  
The pattern of all staid propriety,  
But even she at times could not restrain  
The wine of clover in her and made rain  
Of slender tinklings, silvery and thin,  
For she carried music underneath her chin.

They all moved gentle and yet fast as fever  
As though each one that cropped the grass had liever  
Be in the sweet and tenderer grass elsewhere,  
Half of the time their feet were on the air,  
So fast they fed, so lean their twinkling graces,  
All of them seemed to be in all the places.

Yet all these slender hungers dancing across  
The late and golden light would have been lost  
Had not a mother been there with her child  
To keep the quicksilver beasts from running wild;  
Being the center, she called them, made them mind,  
She made the keen kids cousins of our kind.

## The Burden

Most of his dreams were quicksilver,  
Never there when he tried to remember,  
Or if they were, as rootless, fruitless  
As ferns on windows in December.

But this dream lingered like the hard  
Shapes of apples in a sack  
Printed in intaglio  
On the apple-picker's back.

In this dream he stumbled heavy  
In an enormous bin of wheat,  
A monstrous sack upon his shoulders,  
Two sinking continents for his feet.

Each step he took, he went down deeper,  
The deadly grain was at his thighs,  
At his ribs, it narrowed breathing,  
The dust of it blinded his eyes.

At last in weariness and panic  
It struck him that he ought to see  
What this load he risked his life for  
On his shoulder-bones might be.

So in his dream he set the sack down,  
Undid the mouth and drew it wide  
To see the peas or pearls or barley—  
There was only himself inside.



## Ruin

His future went ahead on eight slow feet,  
The farmer followed after his oxen slow,  
The ice was honeycombing on the bay,  
This dark March night was breeding up a blow.

It was the last time, likely, he would come  
This short and white way home over the sea,  
The ice would soon be going, and white waves  
Run where his oxen plodded cautiously.

No sound of warning, but his future was  
Gone before his feet, and all was black,  
East to west the pallid floor of night  
Had opened, and he stared into the crack.

He threw himself upon the edge and tried  
To lift the choking chins upon the shelf  
He stood on, but the shelf kept giving away,  
And he was in the cold dark death himself.

Three times he got out on the ice, and three  
Times he got the wide and pleading eyes,  
The patient heads up on the edge of life,  
Then they were gone for good with sorrowful sighs.

The man stood quiet, and he gazed wide-eyed  
Into the ruin of ten best young years,  
Then, it being night and no one there,  
For his oxen's sake he burst into tears.

## Early Woods

Here is the time of doubled goods:  
Skies are bluer for being in woods,  
Twigs on trees are more like lace  
Because new buds are stitched in place.

Leaves are promises, not shade,  
The smallest ivory violets made,  
Where threads of woodland rivers run,  
Have their faces full of sun.

Hepaticas opening sharp and new  
Have driven holes and let sky through  
The forest floor, and in dark moss  
There are heavens to step across.

Blue violets have pulled down sky,  
The sun-lamp hangs in the maples high,  
But it hangs also bright and nigher  
In dogtooth violets' bells of fire.

The drops of the cold snow are gone,  
But drops of warmer snow are on  
The bloodroot's crinkled leaves. Deep-eyed  
Snakes flow by the water's side.

Leaves like adders, adders like brooks,  
Like lovelier things each loveliness looks,  
Serpents and lilies do double duty:  
This is the month of doubled beauty.

## New Englanders

New Englanders got on well with the wild ;  
They did not let it come too close, for reasons.  
Because they took their faith and parents hard,  
They did not look for gentleness in seasons;  
They liked a Winter that was deep in snow,  
A Spring that burst one night into dandelions,  
Summers clear and quick as quicksilver,  
And Falls of flames in colors like New Zion's.

Being lovers of loneliness, they loved  
The loneliness of their hills and winds and pines,  
Their sharp proverbs and their pungent words  
Went well with bayberry and balsam spines.  
They kept their houses picked up, they were glad  
Pastures and woods kept themselves picked up, too—  
Each ledge had a neat fringe of junipers,  
Wherever trees left off the wood ferns grew.

Because their briar-rose was brief and kept  
Out of the way of plows and curling corn,  
Fathers were brief in words of love and praise,  
The babies showed reticence as soon as born.  
Of course the winds were solemn in their sound,  
Jehovah was so near them all their years.  
They learned to leave their loved ones, as the bright  
Song-sparrow left brief Summer, without tears.

## Year's End

Beauty at the year's end is all lost,  
The silverwork of the delicatest frost  
Turns all the sodden leaves spilled on the mud  
Into heatless fire in the flood.

The woods have stillness, now the leaves are shed,  
But the unknowing stillness of the dead,  
And though the mire is marked by slender feet,  
It is the cautious lacework of retreat.

There is no mating, no love songs are sung,  
In all the vast world there is nothing young,  
No new eyes catch light in the frost-struck brake,  
There is no silken thread of an infant snake.

All life is old or cold, or on tiptoe  
Ready to eat the last supper and go,  
Bitter and urgent paws work at the ground  
Hollowing narrow chambers for the drowned.

On the bough shines the lantern-eyed raccoon,  
The silver sliver of a vain new moon  
Is caught in the thorny skeleton of briar,  
No living thing will wax with its waxing fire.

The partridge walks the woods, but walks on wire,  
His eye lit by his madness' spreading fire,  
Though the eye of the late last woodcock glows,  
It is the light going out before the snows.

## Ten Yards of Boys

Being boys, they sit by kind,  
They desert the she-ones there,  
Along the window rails they sit  
In their spanked-down party hair.

In society they will have  
Only the onlooker's part,  
They sit like Stoics blank of face  
With irony in the heart.

They pity their parents and the girls  
Making believe the world is good  
And singing songs. Their Spartan seats  
Press on the hard and splintery wood.

Ten yards of solemn lonely boy,  
Aloof from laughter, love, and light,  
Wise with nine or ten long years.  
Ten yards of poems and dynamite!

For in these much too early men  
Our glory and our power hide,  
And they will soon leap down and split  
The world and show the flame inside.

These boys will join the party late,  
But they will make it ring and shine,  
Once they get over being old  
And get their pants off the hard pine!

## For My First Grandson

It may be you are wise to look like me,  
Though people have never found my face a beauty,  
For bones are bones, and squareness may declare  
Anatomy is less handsomeness than duty.

I have never found the face was good  
At moments when I willed it to look double,  
A homely face is the best kind for a poet,  
A good face also in a time of trouble.

For such a face will never seem the worse  
For all the lines that life can leave upon it,  
The wearer will always look deep to find  
The light by which the face of things is lit.

My three names are good ones. Take them, boy,  
And welcome to the good the names have brought me.  
Two for strength, Robert, Peter, and one  
For the tenderness sorrow has taught me.

You will need two strengths, being a man,  
And sadness is the making of many a one.  
Take my face, wear it wide to the world,  
Be sad and doubly strong, my son of my son!



## To a New Little Grandson

You will not always be red  
Nor have a wrinkled old man's head!  
In an early good tomorrow  
Your sad eyes will have lost their sorrow.

You will learn about your hands,  
Find the way a strong man stands,  
Learn to smile, to know real grief,  
And live well on a small belief.

This sadness you will put aside,  
Come to gaiety and pride,  
Discover your mother and the sun  
And how to sing and fall and run.

Some day soon upon my knee  
You will even discover me,  
Not wise, for all my whitening hair,  
But with love by me in my chair.

So sleep and eat all you desire,  
Grow into your handsome sire,  
Into your lovely mother's graces,  
And into me in some small places!

## Geoffrey's Poem

It is hard, Geoffrey, being second  
To a handsome, brilliant brother,  
Not being brand-new and unique  
To your father and your mother.

You had to wait a day or two  
Before you even got your name  
And seven months before your grandpa  
Wrote your poem. It's a shame !

You will have to step into trousers  
When your brother vacates them,  
Take opinions and your orders  
When your brother dictates them.

But you shall have your own, new poem,  
And, old Geoffrey, this is it.  
When you are old enough, commit it  
To your memory bit by bit.

You won't have to look like any  
Parent, uncle, you can be  
Your own self, choose a profession  
In most utter liberty.

Grow good muscles, you will need them  
When brothers and others sit on you,  
Raise a good character and manners—  
Remember, grandpa wills you to.

Find one thing above all others  
To do off-hours all your life,  
It will mean more happiness to you  
Than seven sons and a sweet wife.

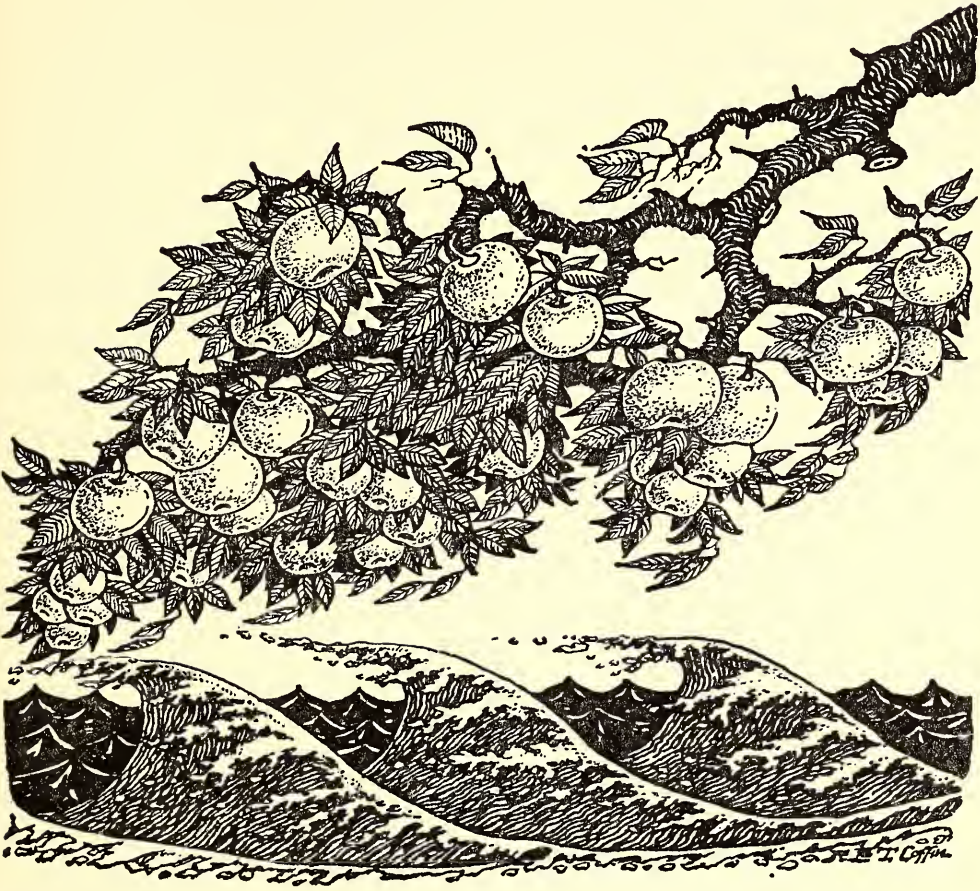
Learn to like yourself, and never  
Follow the footsteps of the crowd.  
Be a good boy, be a straight man,  
Grandpa will know and will be proud.

## My Place Has Its Small Fruits

Too high under the Northern Lights to be  
Fertile, too much the bare bones of the sea,  
My place has its small fruits and hard flowers:  
Crab-apples, brown men quiet as night hours,  
The hardhack's lacy spires of purple flame,  
Firs and waves no plows or boats can tame,  
The high sweet cry of plovers, the gray ledges  
With white eternal thunder for their edges,  
Huckleberries tasting of sea and frost,  
Dry everlasting-roses, lonely lost  
Symphonies of bells rung by the waves,  
Deer furrowing the ocean, the bright graves  
Always looking to sea on the high hills,  
Flute of the thrush, the whisper of whippoorwills,  
Fierce little boys as wiry as the deer  
With freckles burning on them ear to ear,  
The pasture with crab-claws bleached whiter than snow,  
Steep winding paths where men and women go  
Forever single through the junipers.

Whatever lives in hard cones, thorns, or burrs  
Against great wind and cold thrives here and shines:  
Charity, the silver-running pines,  
Independence, long-visored lobstermen,  
The sharp high dory with the strength of ten  
Other boats, the chickadees like sparks  
Of fire on the snow, the rainbows' arcs  
Picking out square houses like cut stones,  
Light that gets inside the hollow bones,  
The sound of song-sparrows coming through a gale  
On islands far at sea, the coat of mail  
Poor, common people wear through all their lives,  
The ageless old men and the old young wives.

These are my flowers: the thorny pink wild briar  
That scents the sea and sets cold rocks on fire,  
Fringed gentians, sails above a harbor's steeple,  
Marsh-rosemary, the quiet, hard, good people.



## The Five Days

John Temple had let the maple trees  
His father planted crowd his eaves,  
The lilac's greedy suckers run  
Against his steps till only one  
Good man at a time could enter his house.  
The woodchuck, the promiscuous mouse  
Had taken the barn, had taken the shed.  
John's rooms were dark and smelled of bed,  
He went slow and cautious-eyed  
Between the sink and the stove's warm side.

Yet once a year John Temple woke ;  
That was when the Autumn broke  
Over the forests like a flood ;  
Two beings burned, one washed in blood,  
One in fire, two cherubim  
Touched their wing tips over him,  
His little house no longer dark  
But lighted like the ancient ark  
Of the covenant. John's home was bright  
With the wild celestial light,  
Fire of maples in each room,  
And in no corner was there gloom.  
John could read even on the stair,  
The tree-light washed his frosted hair,  
He could read the finest print  
In catalogues of seeds, the glint  
Of unused vigor filled his eyes.  
In the buzzing of late, startled flies  
Too rusty for a future life,  
John planned a garden and a wife,  
Boy-children, maybe three or four,  
And cutting back lilacs from his door.



Into five days of incredible light,  
On the frosty edge of eternal night,  
He crowded whole chapters of a man's  
Destiny into plans and plans.

And then the leaves fell from his trees,  
The light went out in his house. His knees  
Felt the old age creeping back,  
His housekeeping grew slow and slack;  
The light went out in him, he crept  
Through shadowy rooms and ate and slept.



## Deepest Silence

The deepest of the silences  
Comes when a wife has gone,  
A house becomes a lonely clock  
Ticking on and on.

The master of the house takes note  
Of every idle thing,  
The spider that foretells the thaw,  
A mouse, a loop of string.

It is so quiet every crack  
In the ceiling cries,  
A man comes now to understand  
Small language of the flies.

The idleness is weariness,  
A knothole grows a beam;  
Tomorrow is a bolted door,  
A dark returning dream.

And how much stiller are the days  
When it grows understood  
That the woman's being away,  
The silence, are for good.

## Poem of Afternoon

There is something singular about the woman  
Crossing the field between her house and shed,  
A common farmer's wife, yet she is going  
As if the train of a gown behind her spread.

She walks slow because her skirt is longer  
Than any kitchen skirt ever would be,  
She is by herself, and yet her air is  
She goes gracious in midst of company.

I believe she must be talking gaily  
Though the wind blows all her words away,  
Never did I see a woman step so queenly  
In any field that bears the common hay.

But now I come up nearer to the mystery,  
It is no mystery, it is a lovely plain  
Poem of afternoon at any farmhouse,  
And I have seen it happen again and again.

The farmer's wife is carrying out the supper  
To all the creatures let out of their pens  
To scratch the stubble left after the mowing,  
The woman has a long train of her hens.

The hens crowd close, the air runs tense, electric  
With joy and hunger, friendliness, good will,  
The hens are decorous and bland, though every  
Eye is lit and tilted every bill.

No wonder the woman is on her best behavior  
Being looked up to so by wearers of wings,  
A continent of good will moves behind her,  
No wonder she walks and talks like a queen, or sings!

## After Frost

Particolored silk loam shows  
By coppery potatoes in deep rows  
Opened in the aging world.  
Frost has been here, frost has furled  
The green sails on the pumpkin vine  
And left the pumpkins bare, they shine  
With golden Summer they drank up.  
A cricket, in the vermilion cup  
Of the tomato which he hollowed,  
Numbed inebriate, has discovered  
He has drunk his death in frost.  
Bowed sunflowers look for their lost  
Jet beads on the powdery ground.  
All square and polished, varnished, round  
Seeds shine with light of another year.  
Fear grips the grasshoppers, and fear  
Has brought the blood to maple leaves,  
The pollen-dusted bumblebees  
Have grown suddenly aware  
Death is in the crystal air.

How goes it, Everyman, with you,  
Now frost washes the world in blue,  
Now on the green world woods entire  
Burn with the final, farewell fire?

## First Fish

The small boy had no hat and ran,  
Something had made him into a man  
In overalls not eight-years wide,  
He shouted, his eyes were vast with pride.

He had left his fishing pole,  
Boyhood and bait, at the fishing hole,  
He legged it home on thighs gone wild  
To tell them they had lost their child.

None of the words he knew would do  
To tell the news, but in his two  
Wet small hands he clutched the fact  
He was a man now in the act.

It looked like nothing but a shiner,  
But never a bearded Forty-Niner  
Gripped a nugget tight as this  
Little boy gripped his first fish.

Over the meadows like a bird  
The boy was here and gone. I heard  
The house reel with the treble joy  
That marked the ending of a boy.

## New England Hired-Man

Wise as the serpent, meeker than the dove,  
On ten a month without a crumb of love,  
He held up old New England. Like a hone  
He put an edge on men that cut through stone.

Oftener than not he was a poor relation,  
He resented his lot, his clothes, his station,  
So sweat his blood to keep his scythe ahead  
Of his boss. He beat him out of bed.

He had to be the best man at the plow  
And king-pin artist building up a mow,  
He had a host of freckled boys to win  
To his side with whittling and his grin.

He had to go ahead at things back to,  
Watching for slights. The proverbs this man drew  
From weather and a soil as hard as nails  
Were ones to take the wind out of big sails.

The farm was his by rights, he cleared the stones,  
He loved it bitterly in his tired bones,  
But had to keep it secret all the way  
And drive himself like a slave to sow and hay.

A bachelor, he lay lonely nights,  
Stars at his scuttle-window were his lights,  
Through his open-chamber floor below  
He heard the voices of love not his to know.

He worked hardest when it was hardest going,  
Took pains to keep the family from knowing  
How much he loved the farm, and even them,  
He sooner would have shown his worn shirt's hem.

He held his tongue, but used his good eyes, too,  
He knew better than the family doctor knew  
What angels and what demons tenanted  
These common clothes, these acres, board and bed.

Cut off like Lucifer in his fierce pride,  
He had to wait until the deathbed's side  
To show, too late, to those he taught to live  
What a light a dark, hard man can give.

## White Bird

It was like something he had read  
In the *Arabian Nights* long years ago,  
A bird so cool it could not be  
In this hot land, a bird of snow.

The train slipped on through sand and pine,  
Through palmetto blades and spears,  
And suddenly there was this pool  
And a bird as quiet as the years.

It leaned over the pool like glass  
And was as still as deep love is.  
He had known the slenderest things,  
But never one so slender as this.

The new moon in an April willow,  
Anemones beside a ledge—  
But this was beauty pared to a sliver,  
Cut to the diamond's razor edge.

How might legs no thicker than shadows  
Of spiders' laces stand and go?  
How could wide wings to bear a body  
Be hidden in so soft a snow?

There could be no red life in  
A bird built in this shape of a jewel,  
A creature this cool and beautiful  
Could not hold hunger hot and cruel.

And in an instant it was true,  
The sudden cool bird was not there,  
The snow of it, the pool, the hunger  
Were gone into thin incredulous air.



## Word

Bare willows by the pasture bars  
Are budding out with furry stars,  
Though ice still locks the woods, the sun  
Sets a warm large Summer one.

Not a blossom, not a bird,  
Yet sudden everywhere is the word  
This northern world has entered the clear  
Leafy green half of the year.

The word is raucous throaty words,  
And down the cold green sky slant birds,  
Each with a promise in the mouth,  
Each with beak full of the South.

Every bird with the silver ring  
On his neck is bringing Spring,  
His neck so lengthens towards his tryst  
His words come down ventriloquist.

The sounds come on ahead of the wide  
Spear that enters twilight's side,  
And before the whistling wings can pass  
Pale ghosts stir deep that will be grass.

## Lesson Outdoors

It was May, and school was nearly done,  
So the teacher listened to their pleas  
And took their history outdoors below  
Crab-apple blossoms full of honeybees.

It was all laws and battles for the girls  
Although the sun spilled speckles on their hair,  
But it was bees and sparkles for the boys  
And caterpillars hanging on thin air.

And for one deep-eyed boy of them the sky  
Moved ever so lightly, swung like a hinged blue door,  
The bees grew loud and deep, spread vaster till  
They were waves rolling up an endless shore.

The boy's eyes filled with music and surprise,  
He trembled in the thin hand on his chin;  
It was a harbor under the long cliffs,  
High ships were coming out and going in.

There was no schoolhouse any more, no tree  
And girls with ribbons on them in green gloom,  
There were cliffs and continents and sails;  
He heard the breakers hiss and roll and boom.

This otherwhere he lived and died in years  
And years ago, or would live in hereafter  
And die in. He was a lean stranger here  
Among the girls' words and the boys' low laughter.

And when the class was over and the boys  
Broke from the shady place, shouted and ran,  
They did not know one of their band had lain  
In sad music and mystery of man.

## April Night

On this moment's edge,  
Razor-sharp and thin,  
I have fallible few breaths  
To put all beauty in.

Flowers and hoarfrost  
Lie under moonlit trees,  
The bare and budded boughs are full  
Of swarms of fiery bees.

The stars sweep upward deep,  
The lake shines deeper still,  
A thousand slender ghosts of flutes  
Blow under the April hill.

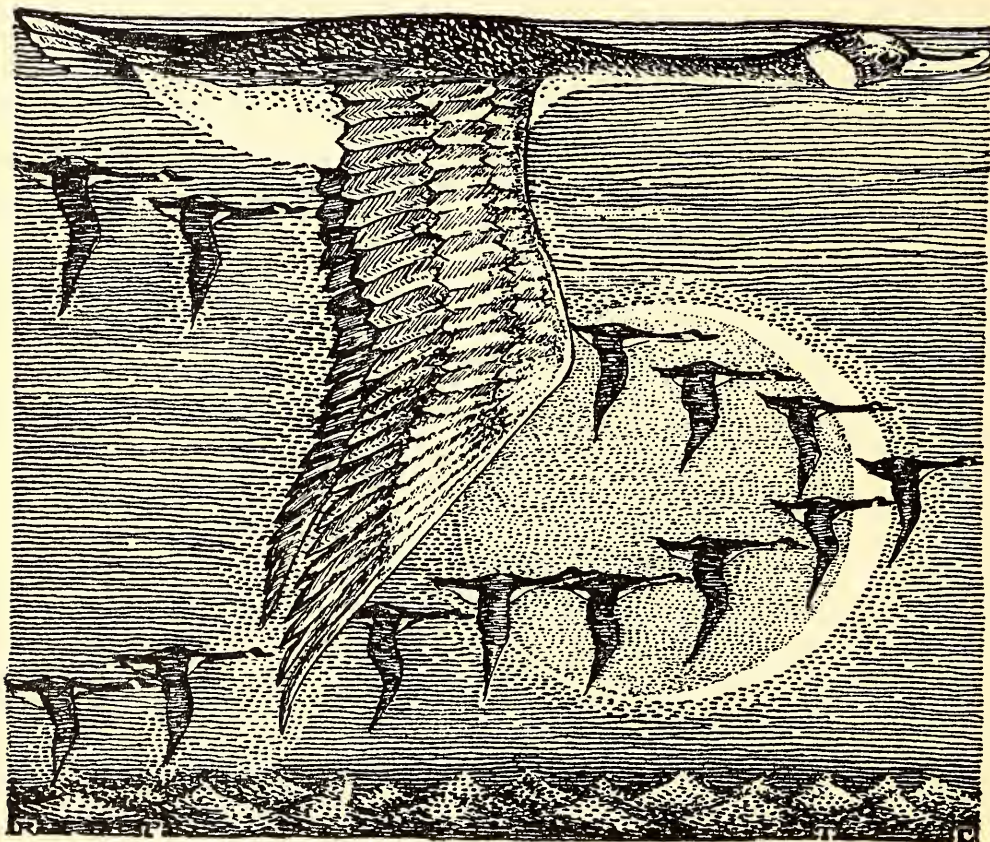
Not a window glows,  
People are all in bed,  
It is late, I am alone  
With this night in my head.

But for me alone  
This high night will be lost,  
This marriage of the year's two halves,  
Of Spring buds and the frost.

Between the dust of stars  
And frost, no rift, no flaws,  
The gentle peepers in the marsh  
Singing the starry laws.

Could I knock on all doors,  
Call sleeping ones to see,  
I might make them doubt their clocks  
And trust eternity.

It is too slender a night  
To be believed in, though;  
Yet I shall take it to my grave  
And past it when I go.



## The Ocean in Him

“Put the shell to your ear and hear the sea.”

The boy had not believed them. Now he raised  
The seashell to his head in the quiet room,  
His eyes grew large, a deeper blue, amazed.

There were waves there! They came up stealthily,  
Curled over slow, reluctant as a song  
To let the silence come in after it;  
He heard the whispers drawn out fierce and long.

It was a sea, a fearful one and deep,  
With no shore on its far side but the thing  
People said was death. It was alive  
As a seagull's widening, dwindling wing.

And that sea was himself. Never till now  
Had he dreamed a boy could hold a whole  
Ocean in him. Tense he stood, and heard  
The sea he was lean inward, roar, and roll.



## To Two Maine Boys Growing Up in Arizona

Although you live where skies are turquoise stones,  
Bill and Dan, stout Maine is in your bones,  
Though ancient onyx mountains stare at you,  
Your eyes are the Atlantic's morning blue.

I am glad you young-ones are so wise  
To grow up with the merry Yankee eyes.  
In a place where trees forget to bear  
Leaves, you grow the molasses-candy hair.

Where air is hard and pinches cheek-bones thin,  
You keep your dimples and the Yankee grin!  
Grow chunky in your clothes, where other boys  
Grow wiry cactus, knees, bare ribs, and noise.

Keep the juice in you. Don't let the sun  
Make your fast Maine colors fade or run,  
What if the sun pours down from overhead,  
Keep looking like the sun just out of bed!

I give you this advice, boys, for, you see,  
I want you boys to go on looking like me  
When I was in your pants, and like your ten  
Square successive fathers as young men.

We had the chunky legs to grip and stay  
When wind and trouble blew lean boys away  
To other states, we had the bean-pot heads  
That kept us in the clam and blueberry beds.

So you grow heads high over your two ears,  
Keep ocean in your eyes, and when your years  
Are strong on you, you boys run east again  
And be two square and merry men of Maine!

## Man with the Lantern

It was the small hours after the cocks have crowed,  
All the dead night was on her, and her pain;  
She could not sleep, she thought of her old age,  
Of her husband who would not work again.

The stars were shining, but the stars were not  
The ones that shone on the farm those years ago  
When her husband was young and took his light  
And went out to the stock through stars or snow.

She fretted, and she tossed. The house was still.  
She was so awake she heard the sigh  
Always in the grain of ancient wood.  
Her pain went on. She wished that she might die.

She heard him coming, and she saw his light,  
Though the stars were shining, it showed clear.  
A man with a lantern. She could see his feet,  
The lantern lighted them as they came near.

Maybe it was her husband. But he lay  
Old and quiet on his withered hips.  
Maybe a dream. Yet she was wide awake,  
She felt her life out to her fingertips.

It was like the old times. She drew in  
Her breath. The tender light was everywhere.  
The stars still shone, but they were nothing at all.  
The lantern light was in his breath and hair.

She closed her eyes, and felt the man come on,  
Pain and age rose forever from her bed;  
She felt him pass, she knew that she would see  
No light again so gentle as his head.



## Boy Up Late

This small boy collared wide in white,  
Up so late this starry night,  
Sings so hard to keep awake  
All the buttons on him quake.

He sings so high with tilted nose  
He had better mind his clothes  
Or first thing he knows he will crack  
And be in Christmas with bare back!

Warmed with carols of the choir,  
His scores of freckles catch on fire  
And dim the candles on the sticks,  
His blue eyes burn like wind-blown wicks.

As his first waking midnight nears,  
He grows all lips and standing ears,  
Ceases now to be a boy,  
Becomes a disembodied joy.

His mother will have much to do  
To get this slender creature to  
The sheets tonight, all sparks and horn,  
She will have to bed a unicorn!

## The House Was Theirs

The funeral was over, the house was theirs.  
They had worked enough to earn it. Seven years  
They'd carried in his meals. He'd had the best.  
His place for his care and keep. They'd come  
Out upon the small end of the horn.  
They'd made their bed and lain in it. He'd gone.  
Twelve acres and the wood-lot, the old house  
With sills gone dozy and a leaky roof—  
They had it in his writing, it was theirs.  
He had been hearty right up to the end.  
The rocker by the window he had ruled from  
They could sit in now. They felt they should,  
But neither of them wanted to be first.  
It made her nervous, empty. His great head,  
Which always turned to watch her as she swept,  
Would never catch the sunlight any more.  
She went out to the kitchen for her broom.

He was uneasy being so alone  
In the best room where he had never been  
Alone before. The clock ticked. Seven years  
Those blue eyes so faded yet so keen  
Had followed him through the window everywhere.  
The eyes that wanted everything done right,  
The eyes that were the live part of the man.  
He had done his best to please them, plowing,  
Harrowing, and haying. Blue, old eyes—  
The kind that God must have, if God there was.  
They bored you through, they made you go it hard.  
Well, they were gone now, and a man could rest.

He did not feel like resting. He went out  
To get a drink in the kitchen. She was there,

Not sweeping but just sitting with her head  
In her shaking hands. She choked with tears,  
“He was all we had to live for, John,  
He was all there was, and he is gone.”

## The Barn-Elm

There has not been the sound of a hoof  
For forty years under this roof,  
Not a solitary sound of a cud  
Turning red clover into red blood.

No hens have made gilt fogs in the litter  
Scratching up corns with the golden glitter,  
No little pigs for forty years now  
Have pressed the keyboard along a sow.

No hay upstairs in umber mows,  
Rust has reddened harrows and plows,  
The barn houses only waifs and thieves,  
Mice, silky swallows under the eaves.

Yet life was here once beautifully,  
And if you doubt it, there is the tree,  
A tree like a universe, tall as pride,  
Covers the barn, white side to side.

No tree could reach such beauty and size  
Without a century of sunflower eyes,  
The hoofed, the cleft, the three-toed feet,  
Hay falling from heaven for beasts to eat.

A hundred horses, a thousand hens  
Escaped the stalls, escaped the pens,  
Escaped the fact that they must die,  
Rose in green arches on the sky.

Now here they are, cascading branches,  
Laces of twigs by avalanches,  
Singing hens turned to singing boughs,  
An elm tree built of horses and cows.

## Fall in New England

Trust a New England house to be its best  
When life is done and things have gone to rest;  
Not only when the people who held it dear  
Lie cold, but at the funeral of the year.

When the elm trees over the house stand bare,  
The light of day comes in unearthly there  
And makes the white paint over everything  
Seem like the plumage of a seagull's wing.

When skies are bright with feathers of the frost  
And all the blossoms of the year are lost,  
Then the rooms inside the house turn flowers,  
The old people there sit lovely as old towers.

The light appears too fragile for many words,  
And one expects such oratory as the birds';  
The children grow most decorous at play,  
The old man here seems to be miles away.

Then the winds of the bare world come through  
The walls, and closer than one ever knew  
Are the absolutes of silences,  
All the strongest sit with huddled knees.

The housebound ones are soberer for clear weather,  
Hail and farewell have stolen close together;  
The ones who sleep away are here in hosts,  
The ones with plans and promises are ghosts.

## Two-Year-Old Man

He is so young, he has no chance  
To wear any kind but raspberry pants,  
But he knows he is built to be  
A man, and makes bee-line for me.

He knows that I, for all my weight  
And being a stranger, am his mate  
And feel the feelings he will know  
When he has had the time to grow.

Two-years-old is hardly old  
Enough for a man to get good hold  
Of everything, do steps and leaps,  
Yet all he does he does for keeps.

So he runs from his mother's skirt  
To watch his grandfather dig the dirt.  
Runs from indoors into the sun  
To watch the haying being done.

He has only twenty words:  
*Father, mother, bread, and birds,*  
But he makes every small word do  
The grave work that he wants it to.

Not sure of many things, he grins;  
Though not so steady on his pins,  
He stands with his thighs well apart,  
Under the weight of a man's heart.

I do not know of a better friend  
A man could have at his day's end  
Than this in trousers of brief span  
So gravely bound to be a man.

## Healed Man

The man was feather-minded. People smiled  
And called him "Senator" to his bland face ;  
He had not got over being a child,  
Talking big, and letting his words race.

But he drove past my house on his old cart,  
All by himself, and quiet with his plow ;  
His horse was bones, the harness falling apart,  
Yet he was a healed and whole man now.

The dusk of Spring was deep over his white head,  
Evening and weariness had gravened his eyes  
And made them deep. He was a maker of bread ;  
Twilight and his work had made him wise.

He had done a man's work, he had laid  
Deep furrows open to the sun and rain ;  
His dignity demanded he be weighed,  
Not by his mind, but by the coming grain.

He was not simple now unless it be  
Seeds and the flowers, fruit and birth be so.  
He drove his ribbed old cart-horse solemnly  
Towards a deep, fierce end. I saw him go.



## Golden Chain

Sorrow can start a golden chain growing:  
An aspen riven in a great gale's blowing  
Bled drops of honey from its broken heart  
And gave a living chain its airy start.

A yellow-bellied sap-sucker flew by  
And saw the honey with his round gold eye,  
He stopped, he sipped, his heart turned into bells,  
His head turned hammer and drove a dozen wells.

The feathered miner drank deep of the sweet  
Until the steel springs of his clinging feet  
Unwound their jetty coils, the bird let go  
And flew off half new honey, large and slow.

A nervous humming-bird seeking a rose  
Breathed in the twelve new wells at his fine nose  
And stopped and needled each well turn by turn  
And drank the nectar that he did not earn.

And when that shimmering green flame had gone,  
Small imitations of the flame came on,  
The honey was sopped up by living cloths  
Of the lambent humming-bird-like moths.

Link by link the chain grew, and each linker  
Was followed by a delicater drinker  
Until the chain was lost to common eyes  
In a cloud of mote-like amber flies.

So sorrow loses her sadness and her name,  
And dying is another kind of flame;  
A broken thing creates unbroken things,  
Unrolls a circle of cyclones on small wings.

## Boy Afire

The boy had on a ragged coat,  
Through lonely night he was afloat  
With muddy turnips on the bay.  
His father seemed as far away  
As God at the gunlow's other end.  
The boy was tired, he could not bend  
His knees without a pain or two.  
It was starry cold. He drew  
His knees up high, retired within  
His thin sharp bones, knees to his chin,  
Small calloused hands held in his heat.  
Stars burned by thousands, burned a complete  
Circle down under the bay below.  
They went with the tide, the tide went slow,  
It seemed a thousand miles or more  
To warmth, to sleep, the other shore.

The boy had eyes a fever-bright,  
Suddenly the starred whole night  
Came into him, and he was it,  
The small stars there outside him lit  
Stars in him, he came afire.  
There was no boat, no bay, an entire  
Globe of crystal fiery joy  
Was there where there had been a boy.  
The boy was the vast, below, above,  
Outside the years, he was white love,  
He held his father in the hollow  
Of his hands as he might a swallow,  
Cold and terrified and small.  
He warmed his father, he warmed all  
Fathers and small boys there would be,  
He warmed the cold stars and the sea.

## Lobstering Man

The lobstering man has learned to stand  
On seas that lean against the land,  
Straight and tall and all at rest  
As the world tips east and west.

When the south wind breeds a blow,  
When the no'theast slants with snow,  
In the rain and in the shine  
He chugs about his work bee-line.

Long of visor, deep of eye,  
Where the taut white seagulls fly,  
In big hands of bronze he draws  
The trap home with the maddened claws.

His fingers move between the shears  
Of snapping green, he sorts and clears  
The tangle of the horny rout,  
Baits his trap up, shoves her out.

With all the weathers his face is lined,  
In starry solitude of his mind  
He stands and steers, his captain, crew,  
Alone as God upon the blue.

## Hate Comes Late

Young robins with first feathers in their nest  
Believe the world will turn out for the best,  
New rabbits even when mere down and blind  
Are well-behaved and decorous and kind.

The blue wasps are most polished in their tact,  
Small-waisted and enamelled hornets act  
With suave decorum when they come to call  
And look for flies and spiders on my wall.

I do not know an evil one among  
The sparrow-hawks, the cricket that has sung  
All Summer under my hearth with treble din  
Lowers his tune when I have callers in.

Bull-calves make allowances for shy  
Little boys, and hungry hound-dogs cry  
Courteously and gently for their food,  
I never knew a wide horse to be rude.

Wild birds and animals are not all wild;  
Think of the lynx as you would of a child.  
Cruelty and passion flower late;  
It takes a child a dozen years to hate.

## The Stranger

The boy with blue eyes wide apart  
Knew his father all by heart,  
Whether he walked or whether he stood,  
Each thing the large man did was good.

But one day this good man he knew  
Was gone. The tall man had his two  
Thighs apart and opened land  
Holding the plow with each brown hand.

Sitting in innocent bluets sown  
Like stars, the boy was star-alone,  
He watched the stranger who was taking  
His father's place, his round chin shaking.

The stranger in his father's broad  
Overalls ripped up the sod,  
From the way he looked behind  
This man never could be kind.

And he was stern and fierce in front,  
His eyes were sharp, his mouth was blunt,  
No boy could rest against his shirt,  
The man's big-knuckled hands would hurt.

It was all strange and far away,  
Yet the boy recalled a day  
He saw his father bend and kiss  
His mother and be a man like this.

This was what the world would be;  
Some day the boy supposed that he  
Would have to turn his own back on  
Some little boy and so be gone.

## Through Fire

He rode through the October world, and it  
Was the Apocalypse, the trees were lit  
And blazed like colored bonfires on each hand;  
The light came from inside a burning land,  
He went between long rows of leafy suns,  
The frost-struck maples, red and golden ones.  
On the edge of Winter Summer stood  
Beautiful in her spilt and fiery blood  
So radiant the rider's throat grew tight  
Seeing how death was trees with leaves of light.

He rode on with fire on his hair,  
His griefs and troubles round him like the air;  
He had always gone through fire, red sorrows,  
Golden days doomed to be drab tomorrows.  
All years were good, and good their deathly ends:  
The sons begot and lost, the lost friends,  
Sadness foot to foot with joy as a tree's  
Shadow, the children gone from a man's knees,  
Love briefer than brief Summer, gone for good,  
And dark forever just back of the flaming wood.

## Little Boy Running

He is not running to reach a place  
Any more than flowing air,  
His smile is not only on his face,  
It is on him everywhere.

Do not look for his bright mind  
Behind the blue flame of his eyes,  
It's in his flying heels behind,  
It is curving out his thighs.

His brain is in his hands and heart,  
His brain is knees and ten taut toes,  
The little boy in every part  
Of his brief trousers thinks and knows.

Time has not yet spun the mesh  
Between pure goodness and desire,  
Happiness and rankling flesh  
Are one substance, hot, entire.

This runner runs on, and he stays  
Forever beautiful and still,  
Law runs level with love and plays,  
In short pants runs ancient will!



## Men Came Through the Floor

People, green earth, the trees were at his door,  
But sea and waves were in under the floor;  
Whatever he thought, whatever the games he played,  
The boy heard sea below and waves it made.

Even in the midst of vast night's gloom  
The floor raised up, a man rose in the room  
With light below him, came up shadow-eyed  
From lanterns, nets, and boat upon the tide.

It was as though his father came from a star  
And brought the light home with him from the far  
Starry places he had sailed that night,  
Came through the floor and filled the house with light.

It was the same even in sunlit day;  
His father and his friends came home that way,  
The boy looked down and past them as they came;  
The sun was there, it licked the waves with flame.

Sometimes the men brought up the silver fish  
Or quahaugs opening like a blue-edged dish,  
But always they had sun or stars somewhere  
Below them as they came up stair by stair.

It was the kind of home a child whose head  
Was full of stars and books would choose. His bed  
Stood over something deep and blue as thunder,  
And men did not come in but come from under.

## The Sea Was All

As I climbed the hill, the sea climbed, too,  
Till over me was nothing but blue.

The higher I went mounting up,  
The deeper was I in a cup.

Cup of a morning-glory's bell.  
Deep down white houses, white ships fell.

The white was now in under me,  
Around me thunder-blue of sea.

The needle of each church's steeple  
Sank down and down, the white-faced people.

The houses were cubes and children's blocks  
And blown dust all the high sea-hawks.

The sharp sloops sailing up the tides  
Slid lower down the cup's blue sides.

The sea was all, was all there was,  
Space shrivelled up, I felt time pause.

Words and love far, far beneath  
And I above the need to breathe.

I a bee with star-wide room,  
Lost in the ocean's azure bloom.

## Names in a Tree

No one had told the boy. Somehow he knew,  
Since he had a mind bright as a honeybee,  
That he was doing a deeper thing than carve  
His name and a girl's name in a tree.

The freckles on his face were close to the beech's,  
The tree's warmth and his own were one whole thing;  
He cut the names in deep and put a heart  
Around the names together like a ring.

It was forever. The girl might hope to change  
As often as the moon or tides of the air,  
But he had bound her with a living rope.  
This was for keeps. She was forever there.

The girl would grow; but the tree she lived in now  
Would grow, the chain would never come apart,  
Would widen alive. The swallows would quit their young  
Easier than she could go free from his heart.

He had put his deep secret in the deep  
Secret of a tree, these joined names should  
Grow into a wildness and one circling strength  
Like rings of the white years in the beechwood.

He had the sun and stars upon his side,  
Now he had asked a live tree to attend him;  
Spring that brings the lambs would swell his love,  
All rainbows, winds, and showers would befriend him.

It was for keeps. She never could escape,  
The long roots of the beech would bring up powers;  
He had planted himself like seeds in her,  
Their sons would come as surely as the flowers.

## Men and Wives Grow Like One Another

Because the fisherman who lives in weather  
Grows to look like winds and open skies,  
A man and wife who have lived long together  
Grow like each other in the face and eyes.

Against the hidden grain of selfish bones  
The lathe of the stars turns out the laws of life,  
A man who thought he would be sharp and hard  
Finds in his marrow the gentleness of his wife.

A man may think his skeleton his dwelling  
To possess in secret, tenant alone,  
Yet one day he discovers in surprise  
Love has struck him deep and bent the bone.

With passion of the young he could believe  
He would impress his will and then escape  
Free of love, and now, at the cool long last,  
He sees in himself love's bronze and tender shape.

So he who would beget is now begotten,  
Love has moved deep against the flesh and time.  
Old fishermen blend with the sky and wind  
They stood against all lonely in their prime.

## Overall Day

From green Atlantic at the east  
To gray Pacific's shore,  
A blue tide now is rolling north  
Bringing Spring once more.

Surer than the flutes of frogs,  
Surer than the robin calls,  
Comes the sign of Spring, the day  
Boys put on overalls.

Ten million little blue boys deep  
The wave of Springtime glides,  
On every hill and meadow now  
Blossom blue backsides.

Out of pants they must keep clean  
Small boys have leapt free  
And jumped smack into the sweet hue  
Of utter liberty.

Out of manners they have sprung,  
Out of clothes that hurt,  
And put on blue democracy  
And tumble in the dirt.

Long and short, the good, the bad,  
Dark, medium, or fair,  
The boys kick bare toes on the clouds  
And stand upon their hair.

Rich and poor and bright and dull  
Have become one thing,  
Pure boy and pure American,  
It's overall day of Spring!

## Second Boyhood

He was an old, old farmer now,  
Too feather-kneed to follow a plow,  
At swinging a scythe he kept the knack  
But not the wind and not the back.

He found it a bitter, bitter pill,  
But he grew resigned and went downhill  
To the level of a boy of ten  
And handed tools to the young men.

He turned the stone where once he held  
The scythe, and after trees were felled  
He split up branches which were pindling  
For the women and their kindling.

A boy without a boy's quick eyes,  
He lugged the bags of smaller size,  
Picked up potatoes in the rows  
Without the joy of a boy's bare toes.

Yet bitter, bitterest of all,  
He found no stay, he had to fall  
To a boy of seven, of six,  
And chop the baby birchwood sticks.

Still he did the things he could.  
One night he carried armfuls of wood  
Into the house in shrunken pride,  
Lay down tired, happy, and died.

## Where You Chose to Be

Summers, when the years were young,  
You climbed this hill, you chose  
This graveyard for your own between  
The spruces and wild rose.

The winds here had the sea in them  
And the cows' sweet breath,  
Wood-thrushes called from hill to hill,  
Death here was not like death.

Dark sprucewoods where the sun came up,  
A green farm where it set,  
Church to south and school to north,  
Here all the good things met.

Small boys and big *Geographies*  
Went past along the road,  
Folks in Sunday-meeting clothes,  
The hayrack's honeyed load.

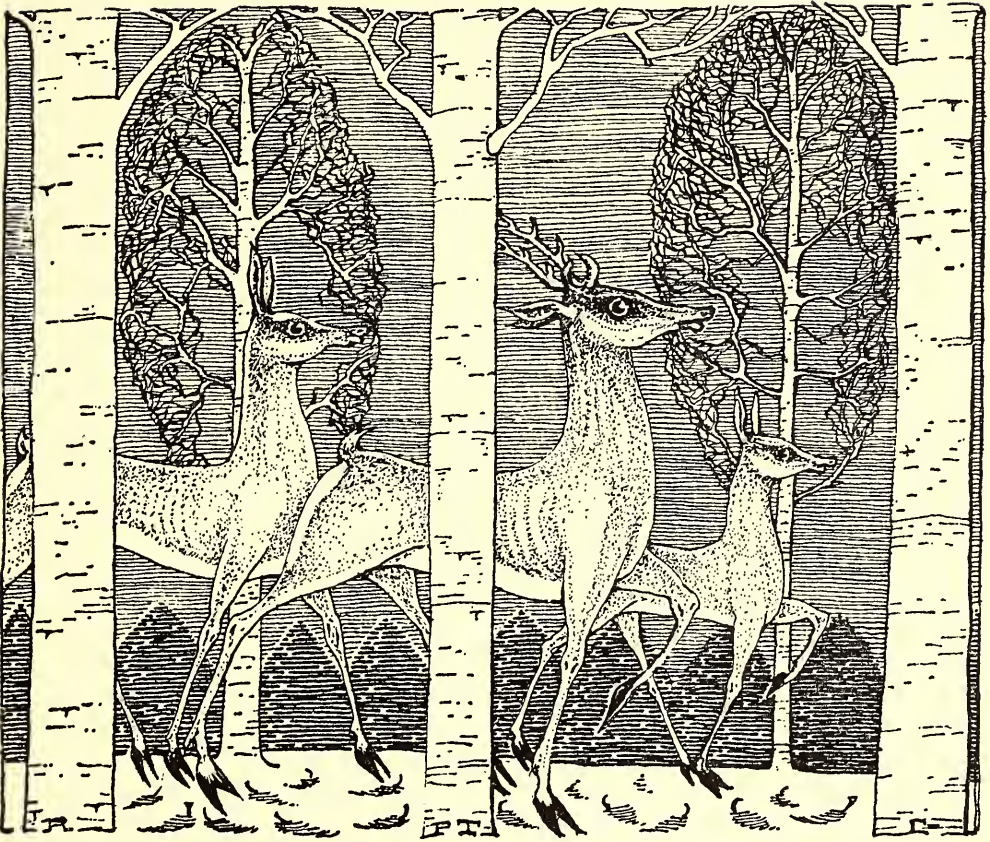
Here were captains home from sea  
A hundred years ago,  
Old babies rocked to sleep for good  
Under the Spring or snow.

The lichened slates with willow trees  
Weeping lovely lace  
Where the young wild rabbit showed  
His shy, wrinkled face.

Now on the island where you found  
Wild strawberries and love  
You lie in the graveyard of your choice,  
And the sea winds blow above.



Deer stare at the tinkling cows ;  
Rest, where you chose to be.  
The high fog comes in over the hill  
With gray eternity.



## Skylight

The only view out of the room was up,  
And that was why he liked the open-chamber;  
It was a safe small place, and yet there were  
Overhead those twelve blue squares of danger.  
Eyes could look in there, if eyes were ever  
Over a house, and see all his mind hid,  
The light came down from high above like love  
That likes to see a man when he is naked.

It was very close and smelled of heat,  
Jet wasps alive with fire worked like fever,  
Spewing out pulp and making a paper house  
From which the spiders they brought would come out never.  
It was like looking into his own skull  
And seeing hungry thought busy as a hornet  
Building some blind design for an attack  
Upon some other life to feed upon it.

But always above the crawling dark and heat  
There were the cool clouds there, and cooler azure,  
He could look up, whatever eyes were there,  
And meet the searching eyes with fearful pleasure;  
Still a man of secrets and the dark,  
He could be friends with dangerous light above,  
Dare as the trout dares swimming towards the sun  
To call himself a child of the vast love.

## Love at Sea

The island was so far at sea,  
The blue cold of eternity  
Lapped its sun-bleached meadows round,  
And it was walled forever with sound.

Sound like chaos implacable,  
Low bellowings as though a bull,  
Made of stars in constellation,  
Chafed his stanchion in desperation.

It was a place so open and wild,  
Not a house there, not a child  
Could ever tame or make it less  
Than a planet of loneliness.

Never the low trees, never a light  
Shown by the ocean's edge at night,  
Nor a sloop with sail unfurled  
Could make it seem part of the world.

Yet one tender thing was there,  
Slender yet clear in unquiet air,  
Smaller than any human words;  
It was the piping of small birds.

In this savagery of space  
Without a limit, without a face,  
Song-sparrows but three inches long  
Drowned the ocean out with song.

Cheerful flutings, dampened, thinned,  
Yet they came through the vast wind;  
Song-birds proved that love could be  
In eternity, in the sea.

## Small Male Bird

This small bird so brazenly male  
Has only colors, his conscious tail,  
A slim throat hollowed out for song  
To bear his sky-wide pride along.

You would think to hear him sing  
He is a consequential thing,  
Not a bead in a feathered chain  
As multitudinous as the rain.

His poor small feathers painted red,  
A little gold-dust on his head  
Are all the bird has to impress  
His mate with his fierce godlikeness.

Such a pygmy this to face  
Goliaths of inert old space!  
Yet he looks scornfully at me  
Feathered in bronze integrity.

He tips his head back, grows in size  
With song, two stars come in his eyes,  
He stops, he listens to his high  
Notes waking corners of the sky.

He holds his tail up taut and curled,  
Sure he is center of the world,  
And watching him fill so with light,  
I am not so sure but he is right.

## Night for Children

Only the strengthless little child  
Can smile upon the edge of sleep,  
The precipice below the stars  
That goes like death down sheer and deep.

We others, we the strong tall men,  
Grow sad and heavy when we come  
Into the house where we must let  
Our fists come open, mild and numb.

When we who hold the golden world  
In our fingers hot and tight  
Enter the house no man can own,  
Our eyes take sorrow from the night.

But children who take the heavy world  
As they take the running air  
Go to sleep with joy and wealth  
On their careless mouths and hair.



## Circle Completed

A needle in the globular blue space,  
Exquisitely his plane came to the place,  
A pin-prick of white coral in the dark  
Pacific where his name had made its mark.

A hundred accidental years between  
Had washed the name a whaler left here clean  
From the family slate, careless and blind,  
Save for this faint mark he was out of mind.

Three-score typhoons might have erased the spot  
Of whiteness where his name had this white dot  
Of life left, and no far descendant found it  
With the Pacific breakers curled around it.

His distant kin might never have grown steel wings,  
Might have loved continents and anchored things,  
No wide war might ever have so stirred  
Any more than a cool egg turned a bird.

So many hideous chances that there might  
Be no way for a circle to come right  
In all this rounded ruin, for a man  
To link his life up with a law or plan.

Yet here the war was and a young man flying,  
And down he came upon an islet lying  
With his own name upon it in the sea,  
Closed one round petal on eternity.

## Boys Are Turned Out

There can be no room for doubt  
All golden small boys are turned out  
On a turning-lathe. Look there!  
At the middle of their hair  
You can see the spot that stayed  
Still when they were spun and made.

From that center, spiral whirls  
Of the hair start. On a girl's  
Head you see no such a thing.  
Girls were not spun in a ring;  
They stayed quiet and were built  
As placid as a patchwork quilt.

But it was different with the boys;  
They started in a mighty noise  
Of wheels meshed with the sun and stars.  
They began with jolts and jars,  
And on their mischievous heads you see  
Hot spirals of the nebulae.



## Promises

I came up Cranberryhorn and saw  
The world with green Spring sown,  
Yet I saw plainly, too, the world  
Had stopped as dead as stone.

All the schoolhouse windows yawned,  
Life was trapped inside,  
The boys who should be with the birds  
Over their books yawned wide.

But there were promises on the stoop  
Life would waken there:  
Three dogs dozed in the young sun,  
One on each worn stair.

An hour more, three bullets would  
Shoot out and be boys,  
And these woods that held their breath  
Would rock with treble noise.

And Spring could go on with the buds  
And beads that would be frogs,  
School would be out, and all the boys  
Be back all-fours with dogs.

## The Tree

Once he found the tree, things would come even—  
The man he was, the boy that he had been,  
Single, sure, bright-armored as a beetle  
Against all good and live things not in him.

The great pine must be here, this was the pasture,  
And of all things it was the most alone.  
But still the woods kept on, the young trees brushed him;  
The pasture, like the boy he had been, was gone.

Younger than he, the pines had taken over  
His playground with the sunrise on one side  
And sunset on the other. They had ruined  
The world he had known as blue and light and wide.

Tears stung his eyes, the rankling needles pricked him,  
The tree that made him single, safe, and one  
Against all brothers and the boys he loved once  
Had been choked by the years. The tree was gone.

But suddenly, arms out, he came upon it,  
His arms could not reach quarter round its bole,  
It filled the sky with a forest of sunny branches,  
The forest under made it securely sole.

Sole and alone, for the forest was its doing,  
It had grown above all trees and years,  
It kept its head in sunset and the sunrise  
As he had learned over years to do with his.

## The Poem Wrote Itself

I sat still as a man could be  
And let a poem come to me.  
Usually I had to do  
The walking to where a poem grew,  
But I was on a train, and it  
Came, and all I did was sit.

A last red maple over a blue  
Water, with golden light shot through,  
A glacial boulder with a crack  
And a fir tree riding its broad back,  
Forgetting it was a rooted thing,  
Putting each branch up like a wing.  
Pines so still and pines so tall  
Years seemed something loud and small.  
Cows for warmth come close together  
On the bright edge of Winter weather.  
A farmer walking God-alone,  
A chipmunk pretending to be stone,  
Birches so flame-like you could wonder  
Why the grass was unscorched under.  
Indian tepees of dead corn,  
A small cloud wild as a unicorn,  
And a farmhouse hugging to  
Earth so close it seemed it grew.

I did not have to sort this one  
Or that thing out, I watched them run  
All together and make the song,  
As my train flowed smooth along,  
They wrote their poem without a flaw.  
I only sat. I only saw.

## Good

What is good?—It is not far to it:  
The living spiral moving down the bit  
As the carpenter bores holes in sound wood—  
That is beautiful, and that is good.

The authenticities of hammers are  
As good as the points and motions of a star,  
A hammer's head and handle have been moulded  
By meanings when the universe unfolded.

The sharp and equal teeth upon a saw  
Stand equal with the seraphs before the law,  
An axe-helve in its curving is as right  
As handsomest of bird wings are in flight.

Do not say of little knives that whittle  
They are common ware and they are little,  
They are good shapes and do essential duty,  
An axe's blade is cousin to death and beauty.

Where the workman spreads his thighs and nails,  
Where the mast leans forward with its sails,  
A deity is bending over there  
With any number of nebulae in his hair.

There is no evil where a good tool acts;  
A plow is the best and fearfullest of facts,  
And where the loam behind its silver curls,  
Earth blossoms pink with perilous boys and girls.

Go out and look. The carpenter's in his shed  
Making a cradle, with sawdust round his head;  
If you look close and see the workman whole,  
This night, this late, you will see an aureole.

## The Carpenter Works in the Future

This old man is dry and slow,  
He bends rustily at his thighs,  
Yet he is a magnet to the steel  
Filings of five small boys' eyes.

A circle of golden heads surrounds  
The burnt-out head like tongues of fire,  
The boys drink in the man's least move,  
His wide hands are the world entire.

The man drives home the blue new nail,  
He halves the timber with his saw,  
He curls up shavings with his plane,  
And he is walled in deep with awe.

For once, the rankling knees are still,  
For once, the heads are still as deer's,  
The little boys' eyes quiver deep,  
And fierce and straight stand up their ears.

The old man bends and works knee-deep  
In the future in short pants;  
Each man-to-come is sobered up  
And stiffened in a golden trance.

Each boy knows at once that he  
Stands where this old carpenter stands  
Bringing halves of the world together  
And living in his loving hands.

## The Storm

In his quiet house he sat and saw  
Death walking naked in broad light of day.  
Death was in the orchard, at his eaves,  
He saw death's fingers work three inches away.

The rain was trampling down the Summer grass,  
It came like wild gray horses from the west.  
He saw the naked sparrows at his eaves  
Drown in the woven, dry straws of their nest.

At the corner of the house the mother  
Flew with all her strength to hover her young,  
She could not turn the corner, there dead still  
On the level wind she cried and hung.

Beyond the bird fastened to the bare air  
An apple tree full of the twisted years  
Leaned slowly over and went down full strength.  
The man went back to his book and printed tears.

## Last Ride

He knew it was the last time he would ride  
Upon his father's shoulders with his knees  
Around the brown neck warm in all the winds  
And look at things as high as the young trees.

He was too old to be a child any longer,  
And there was a younger boy to take his place  
Being taller than even a man would grow,  
On top of the world, with wide light on his face.

It was the last walk home without the walking,  
His last time moving through the air like birds,  
Along the earth but not against the earth;  
He felt the joy older than all his words.

The boy looked his long last upon the way  
He saw the meadow first, the trees, the ocean ;  
He let himself flow back towards those strange  
First times when love was effortless sweet motion.

Those times when he was always part of the one  
Called father now, who then meant waters and skies,  
Birds and trees, and every moving thing,  
Who was the world unrolling to his eyes.

The boy said his farewell to looking higher  
Out on the world than any walker can,  
To the glassy and beautiful upper light,  
Farewell to being the young head on a man.



## The Broken-Hearted

Little do some robins know  
As they fly the fields of flowers  
In their Winter dwelling-place  
Their lives are numbered by brief hours.

When they come flying north to build  
In apple trees built into their bones,  
They will find their trees charred wood  
And the house and barn black stones.

Because the boughs where they were born  
Have been taken by the fire,  
They will brood on uncut lawns,  
And in their breasts will fade desire.

The familiar and the known  
Have curved their hearts and curved their wings,  
So there will be no more June  
For them in unfamiliar things.

The burned-out people will survive  
And in new houses make new starts,  
But feathered householders will fall  
By cellar-holes with broken hearts.

## The Crossing

It was only half a mile to go,  
The boy went with the man whose head was snow,  
Their farm fell off behind them in the sea,  
The boy knew this was the last ride there would be.

Not halfway over, and yet the boy was there,  
Said goodbye to the man with Winter hair,  
Years ran on, and years were nothing at all  
But trees in great winds with it coming Fall.

The past and the boy's father were all one,  
The father and the farm behind were done,  
This bitter night the boy crossed on a brief  
Water to reason, leaving starry belief.

A man no better than a million men  
Though to the boy a seraph never again  
Would row a lonesome ocean with a slight  
Son supposing him the stars of night.

Tomorrow the man would be common and cold,  
The boy was entering time and would grow old.  
Boat and boy came up to the dark shore,  
He heard eternity close like a door.

## There Was a Hand Still

A wild unholy day had dawned  
In the middle of the night,  
The farmhouse and the big barn stood  
Amazed in their own spreading light.

Around the burning towers of home  
The sheep surged with their flat thin cries,  
Fear had turned to amber-stones  
The widened bulges of their eyes.

They stopped, they stood and watched the fire,  
The smoke of it thickened their breath,  
They put their heads back, then they all  
Ran with heads up straight towards death.

But in between them and the flames  
A smaller fire ran on feet,  
It faced them, and it drove them back  
On themselves with gasp and bleat.

The collie, running cool kind fire,  
Pressed the sheep back on the dark,  
On the cool and kindly night,  
With urgent nose and muffled bark.

It was plain there was a hand  
Somewhere still behind the deep  
Sad old chaos of the stars;  
Dogs still had their sheep to keep.

## The Marble Boy

Pines full of wind leaned from the sea,  
Waves leaned in wild from eternity,  
In between was nothing proud,  
Only people hot and loud.

Random children, unsightly feet,  
Bathers sprawled gross in the heat.  
Then men marching through the din  
Brought the fair-haired drowned boy in.

Naked, forever free of clothes,  
Stony eyelids, chiselled nose,  
Secret symmetries laid bare,  
Sudden cold loveliness came there.

It was like a cloud, and stark  
Faces grew handsome in the dark,  
All the people held their breath  
Before this dignity of death.

Caught at his slimmest loveliest,  
Muscles hardened to their best,  
A boy poured breathless in a mould,  
Made hard marble and cool gold.

Curls forever curled and thews  
Never to be hurt with use,  
Now the boy was safe, and time  
Never could tempt him from his prime.

People knew it, and the eyes  
Of them all grew deep and wise  
For a breath, a hush like joy  
Walled in the delicate marble boy.

## Fealty

Snow was three feet over the world,  
This was the only meat there was,  
Over the pan of food they had set  
The fiery fox stretched quivering jaws.

His muzzle clean as the northwest wind  
And sharpened to perpetual grin  
Tautened an inch above the fat,  
He drank the bones and paradise in.

They watched him through the panes, they ached  
To have the fox trust them and eat.  
He leapt away, three times around  
He ran on four little winds, not feet.

Back he came and thrust the needle  
Of his nose close to the pan,  
But there was the evil smell of iron,  
His brush snapped taut, away he ran.

His hot gilt brush curved with the waves  
His rippling back made as it sped,  
Never had he felt steel or trap,  
Yet many trapped paws were in his head.

Again he came up to the food,  
Old foxes in him yapped *Beware!*  
He made three little lightning slaps  
With his slim paws in the air.

Then he dug the snow away  
And left the pan on a white column,  
Stood on his haunches, leaned to touch  
Eden, but his eyes turned solemn.



A thousand ancient fealties  
Cried out that this thing was unholy,  
The thin fox turned away for good  
And went to the woods, but slowly, slowly.



## The Dispossessed

Be sorrowful for the farm families,  
The horny-handed man and wife,  
Driven now before high fires,  
Leaving the best part of their life,  
High barn, the low house, worn table,  
With grief deep in them like a knife.

Be compassionate for the children  
Leaving the only rooms they knew,  
The nicked old marbles and the doll  
Loved more for being broken in two,  
The children leaving the old and precious,  
Going wide-eyed into the new.

Pity the horses and the cattle  
Quitting known pastures, path, and stall  
Before the blinding terror towering  
To a white incredible wall,  
Fleeing from night turned to a daytime  
They cannot understand at all.

But now in the time of fear and sorrow  
When high flames take the trembling trees  
Have deeper pity for the gentle  
Round-eyed rabbits, drowsy bees.  
There are no places they can flee to,  
There is no second home for these.

Oaks and pines are the only mansions  
The squirrels and striped chipmunks know,  
They have no merciful good neighbors  
To befriend them as they go,  
They run to ruin, flee to perish  
Benumbed by an incurable woe.



There never will be a tomorrow  
For furred and feathered dispossessed,  
The mother thrush will never hover  
On some other hidden nest,  
The doe will not outlive the thicket  
Where lay the young her tongue caressed.

## The House Leans

Now the great winds shake the house,  
People find nothing much to say;  
In between the daily thoughts  
Come thoughts like hawks from far away.

In among the tame house doves  
Sit birds with fever for their eyes  
Now the winds strip bare the boughs  
And leaves snow down the roaring skies.

Now the whitecaps run like sheep  
Across the seaward windowpanes,  
The housebound tillers of the earth  
Find dust in their hands, not grains.

A lifetime of long duties done  
Seems a windy empty pod,  
Tall women never safe to bed  
Run past the windows thunder-shod.

Wide men the narrow little boys  
Dared not to grow to shake the rooms,  
The women tremble remembering  
Vast progeny once in their wombs.

Little people wide as the world  
Sit sad, and now too late they know ;  
Their house leans with them, and the gales  
Over their roof-tree lean and go.

## It Came on Evening

It came on evening, and we all sat there  
At the outdoors table we had eaten on,  
The dogs were gnawing sweet bones at our feet,  
The cobs were piled high with their kernels gone.  
Small boys in blue breeches tugged a cart,  
Unable to be quiet for a minute,  
A girl with spun-gold shavings on her head  
Gripped the cart and rode serenely in it.  
Somewhere in the house the babies were  
Being fed. We talked the trivial things,  
Above the children whom our bodies made,  
Under a sunset like the angels' wings.  
We laughed away the real—babies and food,  
With the ancient river in our eyes,  
The pines ran silver, and high swallows swam  
Through the deep waters of the evening skies.

Oh, we all knew that we should stand and sing,  
Each man of us with great love by his side,  
His children at his feet, and life fulfilled,  
Each man a bridegroom and each woman a bride.  
In never so high a beauty, maybe never  
Again together such a night would we sit,  
Seeing the amber daylight ebb from the river  
And star-tipped blue wings folding over it.  
Yet all we said was what we always say,  
Keeping the best for silence. It was the law.  
We joked and laughed. In those little blue boys  
There was the *good*, as every one of us saw.  
Some wife got up and took the dishes away,  
Turning from a man built well for love,  
A door slammed open, and laughter came out,  
A thousand stars were burning close above.

## Here Ends Desire

The furrow ends in the white birds,  
There are no houses and no words  
Any more beyond that blue  
The little farm runs up into.

The rippling corn knows this is all,  
The last sweet cascades of it fall  
Over and touch the stars of salt,  
The living ladders of wild vetch halt.

The thorny bronze wild-briar knows  
And opens its last, its sweetest rose  
On the azure elsewhere  
Where no bush will ever bear.

The youngest, friskiest ram-lamb gazes  
Into a silence that amazes  
And sees life there is only wings,  
Not running warm and woolly things.

The bronze small boy stares into the end,  
There is no love, there is no friend  
To follow farther into that bright  
Conclusion more complete than night.

The old pines lean with turned-back boughs,  
Here ends desire, peace and plows,  
The late last house hangs on the hill,  
The rest is sea and strange and still.

## Bequest

Blithe frogs will string the swamp with silver bells  
More Aprils than there are stars in the sky,  
The silver sickle of the Spring's new moon  
Will hang upon the budded maples high  
Millions of years to come; and little boys  
Run hot in their brief breeches with the white  
Maybaskets in their hands to hang on doors  
Of girls they love so hard they cannot speak  
More times than there are dewdrops in the night.

Pale bluets will come back in greening meadows  
And trilliums star the hillside in the wood.  
Springs have no end, the suns and moons arrange it;  
The robin will return, as they say he should.  
The bird-on-the-wing will fly and never leave  
The shade of the pines for all her purple wings,  
Snow will turn to mayflowers on the ledges;  
Iron and bronze old laws ordain such things.

Yet never will April's moon, her sun, her stars,  
Bluets, or wild geese in doubled lines  
Come on a boy there once was years ago  
Going with fair hair burning under the pines.  
There never was a law for his returning,  
Only a law for little boys his size,  
Bluets, and bright new frogs. So I bequeath them  
The slimness I had, the yearning, and my eyes.









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